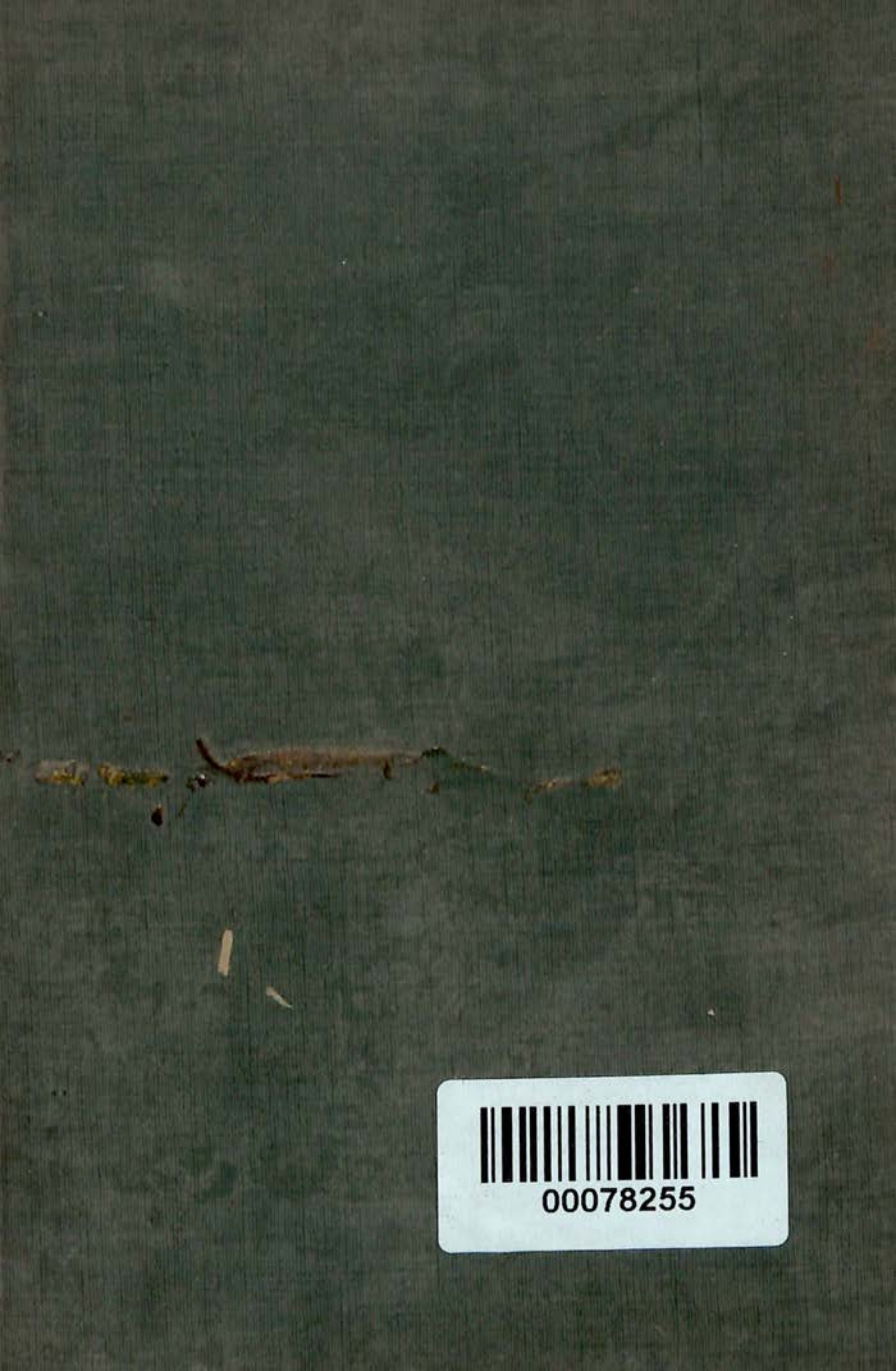
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A FLAME OF FIRE

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A NOVEL

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BY

MRS. HAWEIS

AUTHOR OF
"THE ART OF BEAUTY," "CHAUCER FOR CHILDREN,"
"THE BRIDE'S GARLAND," ETC.

IN ONE VOLUME

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FOREWORDS

I WROTE this story to vindicate the helplessness of womankind; and to show how completely women, like slaves, with their vagaries and irresponsibility, are often but the natural product of their artificial surroundings: how their beautiful possibilities are confined to base or noble uses, as a flame is, through the strength of the privileged partner: how in fact (to reverse the old proverb) a wife is what her husband makes her.

The laws are becoming more equal between the sexes in view of greater peace and union, and responsibility increases strength. But women are still going to the stake all the time. The furnace may have had its uses, but that purer fire which is the human soul is set to best profit where its white flame can give light to them that sit in darkness, not where it only besmirches itself: and all the best progress and highest aspiration belong to times of peace and freedom, as the brightest characters spring out of happy service and love of others.

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A FLAME OF FIRE

CHAPTER I

THE WEDDING-DAY

"Yet for this hour I still may here be stay'd,
And see the gold air and the silver fade,
And the last bird fly into the last light."

ROSSETTI.

WHAT is sweeter than the still, red hour of sunset on some warm August day that has slipt over the brown ridges of an English cornfield into the pale sea, with the sudden flush and silence of a girl surprised? All the movement and the sounds of day have dropt into calm—no, not calm, for the heart palpitates and thrills a little more. The friction of the wave upon the beach as it creeps up in long wrinkles aslant from left to right, sounds up here like a distant reiterated "hist!" The

last breath of wind bowed the ears of wheat, how many minutes ago? The cows have ceased to low, the tinkle of some bell that sounded has died away, and the utter peace is almost terrible. . . . Ah, no! there is no absolute silence: hear that lark throbbing up to the sky to say good-night! The faint clear song seems to echo the cry of a new joy, too strange to utter itself in song or in speech, within a girl's breast.

For there *is* the girl. She sat on the edge of the precipitous cliff, listening now for a wished-for step, now opening her heart to the influences of such a nightfall; her whole being alive with expectation and content, she sat for a measureless space of time, looking over the long horizon where the pink sky touched the sea.

To-day, her wedding-day, is closing in. Before her mind, not realized but dimly felt, a long reach of happy years stretch into the future, a new era, full of fresh duties and untasted sweetness. If the magic chain and rod of sovereignty must needs be purchased at the cost of the freedom of girlhood, verily the

sacrifice is repaid, the bargain is easy; woman married is a crowned queen, and at her touch the beast of prey kneels down. And ah! her kingdom! Such a man! the pleasure to be nigh him is so great: the honour to obey him makes her young heart beat. She it is whom he has chosen, from all the world of women, to "rule him by submission." That frame of iron, that eagle eye, those lips that can tighten like steel, but are so soft when they kiss, are hers, only hers. The lordliest of men, with thews of a giant, and the will of a king, has drawn her into his great life and heart, has shackled her to all happiness with a golden collar—has crowned her Wife! Suddenly, the flush and silence are full of a long, light step, a tall slender form clad in loose light-coloured garb, a refined face with thoughtful eyes not untouched by sadness, and a beard too thin to hide the delicately cut chin and lips, which paled visibly as the girl arose in her joy and faced him.

For a moment she stood against the sky and sea, startled, her *svelte* outline sharp against the red, her bronze hair glowing like an

accentuation of the cornfield's hues, her lips quivering with the unspoken word, and the sweetest eyes that ever sought a lover's; and then he spoke vehemently—

"I take God to witness that I never came here thinking to meet you."

"Sylvain!"

"Aglae! for heaven's sake, how come you here—and alone?"

"Only for a minute. He has gone back to the farm-house."

An uncomfortable pause. "Sylvain, I saw you at the church door. You would not look at me. It was not very kind."

"Kind! Were you thinking of kindness just then?—a little late."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that it is unfortunate we have met now. Not for my sake. But I swear, I had no notion——"

"Sylvain, you are not kind now. I thought we parted friends. I always wished and meant it. You said you were not angry, and we would be always good friends, in spite of—of what had passed. And now you speak to me

like an enemy. You do not even shake hands —now, when I am so happy, on my wedding-day."

"Yes, you are a wife now. You are no longer the Aglae I—knew. I wanted to see the last of her," he went on, with a certain vibration in his voice to which her ear, attuned to a new scale, was no longer sensitive; "that is why I went to the church—and I saw it. Aglae. Quekett is a new creation, whom I know nothing of."

"And whom you will not shake hands with, Sylvain? How can I believe that you care for my happiness?—you will not wish me joy?"

"I do," he answered; "you know whether I do; I wish you joy—I wish you peace—I wish you love: all that Aglae Dorriforth ought to have. I take your hand" (for she was holding it out), "I take your two hands, in token that I always did, and do, Aglae."

Aglae's lips moved with some sweet word of tender gladness which died at birth, for her husband's shadow fell over her face. A man less lofty in stature than Sylvain, but built

like a rock, impassible in feature, marked by a set small mouth, and eyes of steel, which shone on his wife's companion with a glitter that brought the haughty blood to Sylvain's cheek and made his teeth clench. The whole form expressed strength; the whole face inflexible will—the charm of power that attracted magnetically. Aglae snatched her hands from Sylvain's with an unreasoning impulse; both men raised their hats with a certain hostile civility. Henry Quekett broke silence—

"It is a singular coincidence that you should be here, Major Mildmay."

"Less so than that you should be, Mr. Quekett."

"I have come to Oatsdale on my marriage tour."

"I have been here for a week."

A moment's pause, instantly closed by Quekett—

"The place was selected by me for its solitude."

"And by myself also," answered Mildmay.

Another pause: Mildmay closed it.

"I understood that you and Mrs. Quekett were going abroad."

"I altered my mind, as you see. The sugar of a 'honeymoon' might lose flavour in Continental crowds; even, you will understand, if the crowds were wholly composed of old—friends," Quekett pointedly added, in his incisive manner.

Major Mildmay's fine ear caught the whole meaning of the last parenthesis. His old relations with Aglae Dorriforth were known to Quekett; not only known but sentenced. They were likely not only to supply, as was fit and proper, a motive for complete severance of even friendly ties, but to be used as a rod in pickle for Aglae. The "sugar" was not to be too succulent for the butterfly. The very "I," regardless of her presence on this first initiatory day, spoke volumes to Mildmay's sensitive doubts. He caught up the gauntlet with a readiness and dignity which were not lost upon Quekett's brusque acumen.

"There is a time, probably, in every life when a friend may be of service. I shall take this accidental opportunity to assure

Mrs. Quekett, that should the day ever come when she should need a friend—which heaven forbid!—however great or small the service," and he looked gravely into Aglae's eyes, "she can count upon me."

"My wife renders you her acknowledgments," returned Quekett, regardless that Aglae's eyes were gaining a frightened, questioning look, and accompanying the words with a contemptuous bow.

"Since my solitude has been invaded," continued Major Mildmay, still bending his gaze on Aglae, "and yours should be respected, I shall return at once whence I arrived a week since, to Calcutta. The prospect of an English cold-weather is not attractive, and I am eager to start. I shall take my final leave of you now."

"Good-bye," said Aglae, venturing to grasp his outstretched hand affectionately, and meeting his clear blue eyes with hers which his going could not cloud. Then with a curt salute to Quekett, the tall, light figure turned along the cliff and was out of sight. But the ears of love, sharpened by fasting, are quick

as a bird's, and Mildmay felt upon the air the bride's soft, caressing whisper to her chosen—

"My lord!"

"And master," was the set mouth's colophon.

A strange wedding-day this. All the proprieties outraged; is it not almost an outrage to come across a three hours' bride at all, a transition creature that few would venture to intrude on—most (who agree, as do not we all? in Charles Lamb's hatred of the genus Bride) would flee! And what a strange, uncomfortable, prophetic interview! Some explanation is due to the reader. After all, Mildmay declared that he did not seek the bride, and implied that he would gladly have avoided her. Yet why avoid so sweet a thing, pleased as she clearly was to meet him, and receive from him that kindly bridal greeting that ofttimes may be uttered with a doubtful heart, "I wish you joy, I congratulate you, may your days be long!"

CHAPTER II

PSYCHE

"What name! was it love or praise?
Speech half asleep, or song half awake?"

BROWNING.

AGLAE had been named by the fair young mother who bore her on her deathbed. She had been married for several years, and had followed her husband, Major Dorriforth, to India; and when the first child, long wished for, came, she scarcely lived long enough to love it. "Aglae!" she said to it, between waking and sleeping: and after her death the child bore the pretty, fantastic name. When she was a year old her father died too, and the child was sent home to the care of his brother in England.

Our girls are too much watched and tended. The animal nature is too wholly crushed.

Many a character might blossom out into rarer beauty were it not too much shielded from outward influences, good and bad. They are like flowers brought up in a dark room. No doubt maternal guidance and discipline are good things, but all good has a point where it touches harm. Whatever Aglae's faults or mistakes might be, she was at least their author, and had the privilege of blaming no one but herself.

Aglae lived at home, untempted to relinquish it, till she was twenty-one. Many a swain had "sighed beneath her window," many a man had turned to her sweet face and vainly hoped to find encouragement there. Aglae cared nothing for admirers until she met Sylvain Mildmay.

This gentleman, a captain in her Majesty's Bengal Army, came to England in 1880 on two years' leave. Of course he loved Aglae, every one did who crossed her orbit. On the other hand, it was impossible for a woman like our Aglae to come in contact with so much that was good in a man without returning his regard. Mildmay was a distant connection of

the Dorriforths, and on his arrival stayed for some weeks in their house at Bangor. Thus acquaintance between the young people ripened sooner into warm attachment than it might otherwise have done between a man whose sensitive delicacy of feeling won him the credit of shyness, and a maiden who had already passed the ordeal of several offers, and therefore, we may suppose, did not love easily.

Aglae was of rare beauty—beauty with "character" in it. She had smooth clear-cut features, but her complexion almost obscured them—that is, her colouring was so vivid that you forgot to give her credit for form. Neither her skin nor her hair was quite fair—the latter streaky in colour, like that of many girls who have been fair-haired in childhood and who have changed gold for chestnuts. This streakiness was very pretty, the orient colour of the ends crowning her in little twists and braids after the fashion of certain Old Masters' Madonnas.

The greatest peculiarity, perhaps the greatest charm, of Aglae's appearance was her grace of bearing, derived from proportions so

subtly perfect, that one was hardly ever sure whether she was tall or short, plump or thin. There occur in every country rare instances of this complete perfection of human proportion: like the proportions of St. Peter's at Rome, they deceive the eye and confuse judgment. Sometimes, as she moved about the house, her breadth of shoulders and length of arm seemed great—goddess-like; at others she gave the impression of almost fairy lightness of build. Her features, too, seemed—contrasted with other people's—small, her whole head and face small too; then, as you examined her face, the sweep of the line of eyebrow and eyelid, the arch of brow where her bronze hair began in gold, and the curves of the lips, seemed almost colossal. If one attempted to draw her portrait, the portrait always got much larger than life; hers was a face that would have borne colossal proportions had Pheidias, or even Michael Angelo, been at hand to put it in bronze or marble.

Aglae's was a happy life, she took so genuine an interest in everything. She knew all about the farm mysteries: the remedies for a sick

cow, the exact moment to despatch the fat sucking pig, the ailments of the children, the troubles of family life—just so far as everything was healthy, happy, and natural. She did not know how careful Mrs. Dorriforth was whom she visited and where she went; her hours and habits being regulated by unsuspicious devotion to Aunt Dorry's wishes. She knew nothing about sin and its consequences —had never so much as seen a drunken man close—had never heard of revolting daughters, depravity and infidelity, and all the morbid sores which sow life under the surface. That was how she retained her singular purity of view; that was what her uncle criticized in her upbringing. Mrs. Dorriforth had shielded her so effectually from every evil influence, from every wind too hot or too cold, while giving her, within limits prescribed by her confidence in Aglae and Aglae's unquestioning obedience, a liberty of speech and action unusual at her age.

As a child, she was allowed to climb up any tree, as long as the tree was within a certain pale; to wander out alone unwatched, between

certain safe times and seasons; to associate with whom she pleased, high or low, as long as Mrs. Dorriforth was sure of the principles of her companions; to read any book, provided Mrs. Dorriforth was convinced of the way it would impress her. Her opinion was encouraged, her tastes cultivated with an art which concealed art, wonderful in a woman without much experience, but having a rare faculty of tact and observation.

The espionage was so delicate and sympathetic that it was invisible; and the results were so happy that, although the system was too exotic to coincide with Mr. Dorriforth's philosophy of woman's education, he could not persuade himself to interfere.

Then when she was grown up to be a woman, the innocence that had been cultivated in her enwrapped her like a garment, defended her like armour. The men who adored her awoke no self-consciousness in her when they told her how delicious she was; roused no coquetry of feeling when they asked her to marry them, and got refused for no better reason than that she did not want to be

troubled. The girls who were nowhere when she was present, had small excuse for calling her a flirt, seeing how indifferent she was to retaining admirers. The worst that any one said of her was "an odd girl," and I am not sure that this did not involve the highest praise.

But bright and striking as she was, her protectors were clearly-defined personalities too. Figure to yourself an old-fashioned Welsh house, built largely of slate, and hence somewhat dark and cold in colour. The doorsteps were of slate, and so were the gate-posts that protected the garden walk up to the door. The window-sills and the door-lintel were of slate, streaky, with green veins. Over its barrenness hung a warm moving cloak of ivy, and the large walled-in grounds were prettily cultivated, for Bangor is fertile; and across and between green leaves and healthy tree-stems glimmered the pale blue waters of the Menai Straits, and the beautiful broken outlines of the opposite shore, and beyond, Beaumaris and Puffin Island. It was pretty to see the little sailing boats seemingly caught like white

butterflies among the boughs as one looked through. On the other side the house were spreading meadows full of sheep and hedged with slate.

Figure to yourself Mrs. Dorriforth, a lady of some fifty summers, old-fashioned, dapper, tender-hearted, beaming, like a Dresden-china shepherdess in all but the ridiculous attitudes and the disagreeable gloss; always in good spirits, always sympathetic, if occasionally incoherent in method of reasoning, and with her own strange sidelights of wisdom, and faith in her own little systems, which made her a happy woman and a very amusing companion. Mr. Dorriforth was a naturalist. Insects were his work, flowers his recreation; he had a choice greenhouse, and a laboratory which nobody with a nose ventured to storm. A fine face, not without humour crinkling the corners of his mouth and eyes, was his; but pursuit of knowledge had transformed him from the spruce young gallant that Mrs. Dorriforth often declared he *once* had been. His ordinary attire was a loose dressing-gown, too seasoned with drops of science and of time to

be any longer related to any known material or colour ; but in it much good work had been done by him ; and it is hard if in these days of intellectual progress a man is to be judged by his coat. Then there was "old Kate," so called less from her years than her long service in the family. She had been Aglae's first nurse, succeeding the ayah, and was as much an institution as Mrs. Dorriforth herself. Lastly, there was the huge Newfoundland, which had been gradually promoted to be Aglae's constant "squire."

Aglae was absent from home, staying with friends, when Captain Mildmay came to pay his first visit to the Dorriforths. He knew that a niece belonged to them. He had heard she was pretty, and countrified in tastes, and "odd," and the image in his mind of her who was to come was that of a merry, rosy milk-maid, plump and pert, tramping about the farm in goloshes, and brown with the sun. What were his feelings when he came across the "milkmaid," and how did that come about ? It was a meeting as "odd" as Aglae could be, and merits a description.

. Mildmay enjoyed the easy habit of life in the Dorriforths' house. The meals were punctual; but if guests were not so, nobody seemed surprised; something hot was forthcoming at any hour: this came of Mr. Dorriforth's habits in the pursuit of science, and the impossibility of tying him down to times and seasons.

No doors or windows were ever shut; but pretty curtains kept out such draughts as interfered materially with comfort. This was a "fad" of Mrs. Dorriforth's, who had a mania for fresh air.

Mildmay had at once fallen in with this life, as easy as an old shoe, and hence it happens that one evening he came whistling home from a long country walk, and entered the house by springing in at the window. As he did so, he brushed roughly against a woman's figure, and before he could ejaculate an apology, the face belonging to it gave him so violent a shock that he stood breathless for a minute staring at it.

"Never mind, *I* was swinging on the window too," said a voice, no milkmaid's in

its delicate quality; "but you might have had me down!"

"Indeed," stammered Mildmay, at a loss, "I really——"

"I am Aglae Dorriforth," said the girl; "I came home to-day. I suppose you are Captain Mildmay?"

"I am," answered he, more amazed than she could be at his own difficulty in recovering himself. "Pray forgive my stupidity; but you are so different from what I thought you would be."

"Am I?" said Aglae—and here her singular unconsciousness of self came out; she said it almost in a crestfallen tone;—"but I shall improve. I am not bad when you know me. Lots of people like me. I hope you will too, afterwards," and she put out her hand.

Mildmay took it in a tremor of pleasure. "I believe I shall," catching the contagion of her naïve manner. "Heavens, how ridiculous you must have thought me!"

"Not so very," said Aglae. "Aunt is always telling me not to swing there, but I

must swing. I have had some ugly falls in my time."

The thought which was uppermost in Captain Mildmay's mind so possessed him that at these words he looked at her from head to foot, as though expecting to miss some part of her; and then Mrs. Dorriforth entered, and the lamps were brought in, which put out the pallid glimpse of daylight which had transmuted Aglae's face and figure. The awkwardness he felt was soon lost in laughter as Mildmay excused his ungainly entrance, and sketched the picture of the Aglae he had expected to meet. Aglae's prettiness lost nothing by candlelight, and when she smiled her mirth was so contagious that she was herself like a lamp set in dusky ways, or a jewel in dark hair.

It was a disappointment which seemed to him colossal, that dinner should be scarcely over when a message from some cottage hard by was given to Aglae, and she announced her intention of leaving them immediately. Mildmay, seeing that she was evidently going out

alone, offered his escort, and to his dismay it was declined.

"Aglae is accustomed to go out by herself, and it is only across the paddock," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "Our big Cæsar trots before her, and quite understands his responsibility."

"And do you suppose you would be half as capable as he?" said Aglae. "He has his wits about him more than any man;" and she stooped to pat the broad back of the Newfoundland with a confidence that swelled his canine soul. Mildmay being at the moment very far from sure of his own wits, gave in weakly at once, and had nothing further to say.

Aglae scampered away with Cæsar to fetch her hood, and the moment her back was turned Mildmay spoke half involuntarily to Mrs. Dorriforth.

"Your niece has really, I may hope, forgiven my strange meeting with her; but as I jumped in, the start she gave me quite overpowered my senses. She reminded me so curiously of a statue I have seen in Naples that it seemed to me not a real woman, but

a goddess come to life. It is the Capri Psyche; and almost her first words, that she 'had had some ugly falls,' added to my dream-like illusion in quite an absurd way, for the statue is much mutilated. It is a fragment so—so—" he was going to say beautiful, and felt the word a desecration—"so extraordinary that any human likeness to it strikes one as almost uncanny." He went on to tell the story of its finding at Capri, and how Psyche was the Greek impersonation of spiritual love and of the soul, as opposed to Venus, who represented mere fleshly beauty, so that Mrs. Dorriforth (whose fancy was easily excited) was as interested and pleased as though the Capri fragment had been a living example whom Aglae might be proud to emulate; when Aglae came in again and gaily caught up what was said.

"And so you thought I was a marble image!" she laughed saucily. "You looked to see if I had no crown to my head and only one row of ribs; but I am quite perfect (as to bones), and I have plenty of back to my

head, where all the bad passions lie: auntie knows all my bad passions."

"Oh, Aglae, why did you interrupt? I was so enjoying the description; and now Captain Mildmay has forgotten Naples, and Psyche, and all."

And well he might, with Psyche before him, in such a blue hood, and absolutely refusing to let him go with her.

"Shouldn't be inconsiderate, dear," said her uncle—who had not really heard a word—trying to be severe. "Always interrupting: breaks up trains of thought. Fidgety!"

"Oh, she isn't that," cried Mrs. Dorriforth. "Has cook given you the soup, darling? Go quickly, and come back to us quickly."

"Sweet little old auntie!" cried Aglae in her impulsive way, flinging her arms round her neck, and perching herself airily on her knee as a child might have done, regardless of criticism. "I shall never have such another sweet little old auntie!"

It was a pretty group; Mrs. Dorriforth's dainty grey "bull knot" and lace cap that surmounted her clear china face and habitual

dress of light, bright colours, contrasted so brilliantly with the girl's vivid but scarcely fair complexion, and soft, low colouring of hair and robe; but Mr. Dorriforth's old-fashioned formality, last relic of his traditionary love of order and propriety, sometimes reproved Aglae's free-and-easy habits. He disliked all such "antics" before visitors, especially gentlemen. At Aglae's caress Mr. Dorriforth uttered an unsympathetic grunt, which Aglae took no notice of, probably did not hear; but auntie looked entreatingly round at each. Then up jumped Aglae under a new impulse and scurried off.

"Dear child!" said Mrs. Dorriforth, when the door closed, half apologetically, half affectionately, and not seeing in Mildmay's averted face the undisguised glow of admiration. "She is always the same child. If I had ever had children of my own, Sylvain," she added wistfully, "it is what I should most have regretted and bewailed—their growing any older. Every day I should have begrudged; youth only comes once in life. Aglae is very sweet, bless her."

"So sweet," said Captain Mildmay, "that the miracle is that she is still Miss Dorriforth."

"No one has ever come by who was half-a-quarter good enough for her!" cried Mrs. Dorriforth fervently. "I don't want her changed and dragged down."

"Surely the 'soul' would elevate and ennoble the body," said Mildmay, rather incoherently, his old fancy recurring and his voice betraying some emotion.

"Ah, you are thinking of Psyche again," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "True, it should be so, but oftentimes the body clogs and degrades the soul."

"Will you give her to me?" cried Mildmay, the words springing involuntarily to his lips, and then regretting his haste. "Ah, what have I said?—you know so little of me, Mrs. Dorriforth," he went on, very earnestly, taking her hand in his, "forgive my precipitancy; but she is so beautiful, so delicious—I would so strive to have and to hold her just as she is. I have spoken too soon, but if I had your permission to try and win her—though I have scarcely said a word to her yet. . . ."

Flushed and trembling, he could scarcely master his thought, and he was afraid that his impetuosity would be his ruin.

Mrs. Dorriforth recovered from the stun of his demand by the time he had ended his speech. "Sylvain," she said, very gently, "I have a very, very deep regard for you. I cared for your mother very much. Aglae had her own views on these matters which I should never seek to control. But indeed you shall try; you shall have my best wishes, my dear boy, and no opposition from me. It is too soon for me to say more."

"Ah!" cried Sylvain, kissing the hand that pressed his own; "you have made me very happy."

CHAPTER III

A SUNBEAM

"An empty sky, a world of heather,
Purple of foxglove, yellow of broom;
We two among them wading together,
Shaking out honey, treading perfume."

INGELOW.

AFTER that first premature burst of excited feeling on Mildmay's part, Mrs. Dorriforth pursued the wisest and fairest course with regard to the young people—she let them alone. Aglae was free to see as much or as little of the guest as she chose; and choosing, as she did, to see a good deal of him, some very delicious weeks were given to both of them.

Mildmay behaved with considerable delicacy and consideration. He made no attempt to storm the citadel; and Aglae was too indifferent or accustomed to her charms, too utterly unconscious of herself, to probe after feelings

not brought forcibly before her. So they played together, like girl and boy—on his side intense feeling governed by self-control of a high order, on hers the unreflective enjoyment of sympathy in her modes of thought, a sense of being liked and sought, a grateful, half-child-like admiration of Sylvain's mental power, foreign experiences, and condescension to her.

It was only on the last week of his stay at Bangor that he addressed Aglae in any mode more than of brotherly; but he believed that he had really touched her affections. He asked her to go out for a last stroll over the Welsh country with him; and his look as they went out, cast back over his shoulder, assured the acuter aunt that to-day the leap would be taken. "John," she whispered to her husband, whom she caught on the stairs with a tumbler full of ants, "I do think, I do almost hope, they will come back to dinner engaged!"

"Oh, wife, wife! don't go setting your heart on things; it'll make 'em go cross!" cried the unsympathizing moralist.

The lovers walked far, far into the country, up hill and down dale, through forests of flowers, and heavy jungles of green bracken, and never did their gay chat flag, or fatigue remind them of any needs of their digestive organs. Food was far too earthly to offer to Psyche, walking mile after mile so buoyantly, with such a dazzle of colour over her face; it was like walking with a rainbow or some fairy flower. Only when they were far away beyond mortal sight and hearing, the knowledge that it was a *last* walk suddenly struck Aglae with a dumb pain. She turned round to Sylvain, and looked at him. It was a mute, strange, inquiring gaze, and Sylvain put out his hands involuntarily to her.

Aglae put hers out too, and then recollected herself. "Oh, how silly! What are we going to do? It is like a dance;" and she wondered why the colour began to burn her cheeks and eyes, and her breath began to come rather short.

"It is a farewell dance, then," said Sylvain, half in jest and half in earnest, for he did not understand her. "Let it be a round one;"

and he drew her nearer, and half enclosed her with his arms. But Aglae was not in a merry mood, but a melancholy one. He looked very noble, very handsome, standing against that bank of mosses, his fair moustache and hair holding the sunshine, and "clothing his lips with light.

"Mayn't I have *one—one?*" said Sylvain, bending his face close to hers.

"Oh, shan't I ever see you again?" cried Aglae, in a vague distress, and holding back from what she was willing enough to take, through some unreasonable impulse.

"That depends on you," said Sylvain. "If you care about me, I will always come, I will always be near you; if you don't, it will be better—for *me*—never to see you again."

"Ah!" cried Aglae, putting her arms rather shyly round his neck. Mildmay's passion of joy choked him. He could do nothing but kiss her.

"You love me, you love me?" at last he panted.

"Oh, I expect so! It doesn't seem anything new," said Aglae, resigning herself in

very lamb-like fashion to his caresses, and conscious of a sudden accession of high spirits.

And so they sat down and spoilt hundreds of rainbow blossoms, and looked into each other's faces with new thoughts and new sensations of hope and thankfulness, and they loitered a long time thus, and felt the scented wind on their cheeks and hands, till the sinking sun warned them to move. And so they walked home again, and came into the house out of the sunset colours, promised to each other and very happy. And, "Good God, how quickly it is over!" said Mildmay, half-laughing, as he crushed her almost like a butterfly in his soldierly arms before they met Mrs. Dorriforth. "I thought I should have had to talk, and say so much and struggle so hard to win a goddess; and there, the treasure of Olympus has been mine all along and fifty times sweeter given before the asking; but Mrs. Dorriforth knows how soon I first wanted it."

"Ah!" said Aglae, as soon as she could speak, "I dare say you are already beginning to despise me. You have won me too easily,

and people don't value what costs them nothing."

"Naughty girl! it depends on what it is. If an immortal came down from heaven and gave herself to a man unasked," said Mildmay with some emotion, "it might strike him stupid, his unworthiness, but she wouldn't be unprized."

"You think too much about Psyche," whispered Aglae, bashfully, "but I am afraid I am only a woman; you will find I am only a woman after all!"

But Mildmay was nothing depressed by that prospect, and rather to Aglae's surprise only laughed.

When Mildmay's engagement to Aglae was ratified by the approbation of the families on both sides, and the nebulous glamour of love began to concentrate itself into arrangements for the future, Mildmay decided to quit the army, and was gazetted Major. A soldier's wife in India has oftentimes no pleasant share of life, and it was Aglae's wish that he should settle in England. This idea was very pleasant to Mildmay, tired of his hot and

dusty Indian station. He had been fourteen years away from England, and now the prospect of life in England, always unutterably sweet to Indian exiles, with all its disadvantages of climate and monotony, was as brilliant to him as was the conventional heaven to the conventional saint.

Mildmay was not dependent on his own exertions nor on his pension for an income, and at his father's death would be the owner of a very fine old property in Norfolk. Aglae was not penniless, and therefore prudence gave no veto to their wishes. And the Dorriforths were particularly rejoiced at his intention (not to be completely idle) of obtaining an appointment as agent to some nobleman —one peculiarly fitted to Mildmay's business and mathematical faculties — which would ensure for Aglae the pleasure of country life, and for himself congenial occupation.

"It seems as though the gods had blest Aglae from her cradle," said happy Mrs. Dorriforth, talking over the future with her husband, and sunning her grey curls and delicate frills like a bright little old bird.

"She has had a joyous, innocent youth, but the one anxiety I have had for her was her life after marriage. She is so impressionable and quick in feeling, so sensitive to outward influences, so open and candid, that all her habits of industry and all her tender spirit might be marred by any rough change in her life. Hitherto she has happily had pursuits of her own which have protected her from frivolity and from the worst bane of young girlhood, morbid introspection; and now I am satisfied that Sylvain, who is as chivalrous and noble as Percivale himself, will develop all that is good in her, and make her as perfect in maturity as she has been all through her youth."

"Yes," said Mr. Dorriforth, "Mildmay is a very fine fellow. He will give Aglae just what her character lacks, strength and stability."

"Oh, John!" exclaimed the loving aunt, determined to stand up for her darling. "Aglae is not weak, in any sense, and she certainly is not fickle, if that is what instability means."

"Not quite," answered her husband, "but Aglae has never been tried. She's a beautiful

nature, but she's like virgin silver, she'll bend very easily. She just wants the hammering and that little amount of alloy which will fit her for a useful domestic vessel; marriage will provide that; we shall see what she turns out. Virgin silver does well enough for an ornament, not for anything in daily use. Aglae is a veritable sunbeam here, like a flower in a greenhouse, tended, trained, shielded; but your method with her, wife, has been a dangerous one. Put her out in the sun and the frost, she cannot *endure*, she has never been taught to. She is not capable of a deliberate or sustained sacrifice; she has never been forced to it. But she has it in her to become a strong and good woman, if Mildmay prove all that I hope and believe he will."

CHAPTER IV

A PRESAGE IN A STRANGE TONGUE

"Oh, my love, my love is young!"

WHAT strange dreamy months are the first months of betrothal to a young girl! No new habits coming in later life can so transfigure and idealize the days which succeed each other, but do not resemble each other. A woman of thirty engaged for the first time may have indeed the peculiar sense of inward triumph that she is sought not for her beaming youth, but for some higher qualities of brain or character; that some unusual merit is hers to have escaped thus late the stigma of "old maid" that her younger friends are laying on her. But still, to her, engagement and marriage are never what they are to the girl. Her habits of thought and action are formed,

and interference with them even by him she loves is more inconvenient than delicious; she finds greater difficulty in severing herself from old associations, and entering with zest upon strange duties and into new circles of companions. The glamour of the dawn is off life.

But to the young—oh, youth is something holy, a saint with wings who stays but short while with us—the altering views of life, the new habits and experiences, all wear a peculiar halo. All the joy and triumph are elevated into rapture which has no name, pleasure which is too pleasant to be defined. How little one remembers of one's first months upon that bright isthmus which links maidenhood with marriage!—it is all magical, dreamy, radiant, and leaves few impressions, like that soft state preceding sleep when things are getting double, but not yet dissevered from reason.

Sylvain had been a great deal at Bangor; sometimes staying with the Dorriforths, sometimes at the inn in the town. He joined in Mr. Dorriforth's pursuits, not so much the malodorous ones, his preference was for botany;

and the conservatory soon became a licensed haunt for Sylvain and (of course) his pupil Aglae, who during all these years had never before perceived any interest in a flower beyond its scent and colour.

The marriage was vaguely referred to "next year," and surely a year was not too long a space wherein to become used to each other, and fully satisfied that the choice on both sides was wise and happy.

Mrs. Dorriforth wished to take Aglae abroad for a little trip before the brief London visit which occurred every season. It was arranged that Sylvain should take Mr. Dorriforth's place as escort to Aglae and her aunt, and the prospect of Easter in Switzerland with Sylvain ever close at hand was a climax of delight which Aglae could scarce think of without jumping for joy.

Thus Sylvain and Aglae, with their basket and spud, made a perfect picture in whatever part of the pretty up-and-down country was honoured by their botanical researches. The days were not so long as they had been, and were not so settled as to skies, for autumn was

come, though the weather was still mild enough to show you blackberry bushes bearing budded leaves, flowers, and ripe fruit simultaneously. On this particular day the sky changed, and one of those heavy sweeping rainstorms sent them homewards in good time, though the air was as dark as though it were advanced evening. They were just as happy under one umbrella as under a full stream of sunshine.

As the contented lovers made their way along the Bangor road the hissing of the rain became crossed and obliterated by musical waves of sound—the sound of singing men and singing women who haunted a school beside the road. It was some quaint old part-song which struck Aglae's ear with a shock of delight. She loved old music. Hardly could she follow all the words, but the chorus rose at the end of every verse into a cry of jubilant enthusiasm, and they listened to it as it recurred—

"Dandirly, dandirly, dandirly dan,
She shall marry a proper man;
Dandirly, dandirly, dandirly dan,
When the woods are green!"

"A proper man—a proper man," rang in Aglae's ear, and she started when Sylvain whispered, "I'm the proper man, I hope, Aglae?"

It was not Sylvain's personality that had sprung to her mind as the song broke out; it was some personality very different—born of a ruder, earlier age—she could give it neither shape nor name—it was some presence that had flashed through her brain and left a sense of its having been, of its subjugating her—no, it was not that gentle, refined countenance—not that courtly, quiet bearing—but some other master.

"Dandirly, dandirly, dandirly dan,
When the woods are green,"

murmured the far-off singing, falling into a strange minor chant. It was autumn now, and the woods were red.

As they reached the gate, Mildmay stopped. The rain was over, and the green alleys of the garden looked very inviting. "One turn through before we go in," he said, and she was pacing through the laurels, her hands in his.

"Aglae," he said, "all the weeks and months of our engagement, do you know that you have never kissed me—once?"

"Oh, Sylvain!" flashed out the girl, half angry, half laughing. "What a—oh! what a —one!"

"It is true," he said, "you have let me kiss you, but you have never once allowed me the little bit of pleasure which surely is due to the man you have given your life to. Give me a kiss of your own accord, to-night."

Of all the silly little palpitating creatures, Aglae was the worst. This simple, natural act she could not do. She argued, she prevaricated, she blushed and laughed, she let her affianced steal several from her, but she could not make up her mind to take the initiative.

"Is it too much to ask, when we are to be married so soon?" he asked, laughing a little.

"No—I don't know—I can't," was all he got. "What a tease you are; and it is getting so late—nice old Sylvain—darling Sylvain, don't tease, we *must* go in."

"I have been too easy a lover," said Sylvain. "You are positively shy about it after all.

Naughty girl, I shall only kiss your hand for the future;" and so Aglae ran in, hot and mirthful and mischievous, and Mildmay left her to the dreams of maiden obstinacy.

"Il y a dans l'amour toujours l'un qui baise et l'autre qui tend la joue," says the French proverb, with a terrible truth underlying it. Aglae loved Sylvain, loved him the better for his gentle forbearance; but she was not yet wholly his, as a woman should be who gives her hand for life and all. One may be engaged without the marriage of the heart; the day of betrothal does not change all one's instincts and habits. There was as much reticence and modesty in this promised wife as though she were still Diana's votary; and Mildmay was not inclined to quarrel with her.

CHAPTER V

"A LITTLE CLOUD LIKE A MAN'S HAND"

"Beside the stream and in the alder shade
Love sat with us one dreamy afternoon,
Then, ah! she took the left path, I the right,
And now no more we sit, by noon or night,
Beside the stream."

GOSSE.

THE Swiss tour was, as far as enjoyment was concerned, a complete success. In vain Mr. Dorriforth, too devoted to his laboratory to be prevailed on to leave it, laughed at Aglae, and told her if she had a honeymoon before marriage she would not want one after it. In vain he grumbled at the ridiculousness of the project, whose chiefest zest must lie in the chance of one of them breaking bones. Go they did, and to many choice Swiss spots; and though the young people were dissuaded

from scaling Mont Blanc's tempting peaks on account of Mrs. Dorriforth's inability to join them—"till some future time," promised they, with glad looks into each other's eyes—they had the satisfaction of viewing them till they were half tired of their changeless white outline.

One day, in a carriage bound to Geneva, they travelled with a lady and gentleman, who (the latter at least) looked so scrutinizingly at them that Aglae was a little out of countenance. He was a stern-looking man of no obvious nationality, and from his ill-breeding Aglae judged him to be English, till she heard him answer the guard's query.

"Jusqu'à Genève," he said, with an accent too good for the ordinary tourist, and that perplexed her. She could not overhear his conversation with his friend, between his spells of staring. Perhaps it was hypersensitive to feel vexed. A beautiful woman, like a beautiful picture, is meant to be looked at.

One evening at Lucerne they all three climbed to the summit of an incline to see the sun set. It was indeed a fine view, only

marred by the gasworks rising among the pines, and this same gentleman, alone now, was among the group who watched the sun. Mrs. Dorriforth and the happy lovers saw the great glow die out of the mountain shadows, and the "last bird fly into the last light," with an awed sense of enjoyment unspoilt by the knowledge that other eyes were watching it too. At last, it was Aglae who turned, and gave a small satisfied smile into Mildmay's eyes, which, as usual, were resting on her.

"The tourists haven't been so much in the way, have they, Sylvain?"

Before he answered her eyes caught once more the straight, cool gaze of the new-comer, bent on her in a passionless way, but with evident recognition. What effect a sunset had on *him* was a thing none of us will ever know; at present Aglae felt a momentary nervous curiosity to know what effect a girl had on him; for his eyes passed over her with a cool scrutiny which most unreasonably made her blush and quiver—her, used to admiration, and already betrothed!—but this was not admiration exactly; it was the kind

of examination, inch by inch, one would bestow on a horse or a picture, in which the "points" invited the connoisseur.

When a few moments had passed, which Aglae felt like hours in her anxiety for Mrs. Dorriforth to quit the spot so vexed by eyes, the new-comer changed his position, flung his cigar down the height, and moved forward.

Whether Aglae thought that with that firm, resolute step he meant to walk straight over her prostrate body, I cannot tell, but as he came direct towards her, she instinctively clutched Sylvain's arm tight, and felt her heart go a little more quickly.

He rapidly came up close, and addressed Mrs. Dorriforth by name.

"Have you completely forgotten me, Mrs. Dorriforth?"

"Forgotten you?" repeated the good lady, startled. "I really—I beg your pardon—but so many—at this moment——"

"Look at me well," he said, imperturbably, and with a wee sudden smile, very sweet—perhaps by reason of its suddenness—which disclosed a row of little separated teeth.

"I seem to have a recollection," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "Your expression is familiar to me, but I cannot give a name to it. Surely not my husband's cousin, Henry Quekett?"

"My name is Henry Quekett," said the stranger, amused and satisfied. "I was sure you would know me if I taxed you."

"Henry Quekett? whom I have not seen——"

"Since he was a boy of sixteen," he answered. "No; I have knocked about a good deal since then, and have never come to England until this year. My people died in Australia, as of course you know. I lived a good while in Rome and Geneva. Your son and daughter?" he added, looking at Aglae and Mildmay.

"My niece, Aglae Dorriforth," answered the aunt: "my niece and ward for eighteen years—almost a daughter. Mr. Quekett, Major Mildmay." This introduction effected, Mrs. Dorriforth again examined Mr. Quekett with astonished eyes. "I suppose I ought to have known you more easily, but the alteration is so great; and yet the more I look

at you the less I find the change. You left me a pink-and-white boy, a regular little Harry the Eighth. There is Harry the Eighth about you still, I think, but the roses are gone."

"I hope the roses have not left only thorns behind them, as in the case of the Bluebeard king," said Henry Quekett, referring to the royal nickname in the days of Henry's early popularity; "or that at least there is some budding power left in the branch. The years have not seemed to me so long as to you. I feel as though two instead of twenty would bridge the space of my absence. And as to yourself, I find scarcely any change at all."

"Oh, you are a courtier," said Mrs. Dorriforth, her cheek flushing with a sense of gratified pride in spite of her age, and a sort of preening of her dainty plumage. "I was a young woman when you went away, and now I am an old one."

"I knew you directly I met you," answered Quekett; "I saw you at Geneva, I saw you in the train, and now a determined fate again brings me in your path."

"Why didn't you make yourself known at

first, then?" said Aglae, whom the tardy recognition perplexed.

Mr. Quekett looked imperturbably at her. "One does not always know whether distant connections care to be plagued with returned prodigals," he answered presently.

"You had decided the question to-day, then," said Aglae, a little saucily.

"Yes, I had decided the question to-day," said Quekett, calmly.

Aglae felt snubbed, and left the new-comer to Mrs. Dorriforth's tender mercies.

They filed back towards the hotel, Mildmay and Aglae dropping behind, and Mrs. Dorriforth discussing with Mr. Quekett subjects connected with bygone days before Aglae was born.

Mr. Quekett chanced to take a vacant place beside Mrs. Dorriforth at dinner, and so that good lady was able to make more and more inquiries about the past, and Henry Quekett made a good impression on her. He talked well, with a certain imperturbable readiness that accompanied a shrewd observation of all the surroundings and the bearings of affairs.

Mrs. Dorriforth hoped he would go and see them in London when they passed through. She even threw out a gentle hint that his company would be agreeable on certain excursions from Lucerne that she had in mind. But Quekett was not amenable. "I leave to-morrow," he said, without noticing the hint.

"You will have a very short stay here," said Mrs. Dorriforth.

"*We* are going to stay a day or two," said Aglae, before she knew she was speaking. She was sorry the next minute; it sounded like a request.

"Are you?" said Quekett, looking up at her from his *mayonnaise*, and said no more.

When dinner was over, and Mr. Quekett bade them good-night preparatory to an evening constitutional in the innocuous company of his cigar, the Dorriforths naturally discussed Mr. Quekett. To Mrs. Dorriforth he was an object of interest as a link of her old life, which elderly people always hold dear; to Aglae he was also somewhat an object of interest, moreover he was a connection of her uncle. His calm, impassive face and im-

passive scrutiny piqued her curiosity. There was something masterful even in the way in which he smoked his cigar. The small feminine mouth did not seem to belong to the head that might have been that of a barbarian chief, and its smile was so abrupt and so rare that it seemed of more importance than it really was. Was he nice? or was he stupid? He could not be stupid. He was scarcely nice.

"What do you think of Mr. Quekett, Sylvain?" said Aglae.

"I don't think anything," said Sylvain. "He seems a quiet fellow enough. Isn't very polished."

"Polish isn't everything," said Aglae, contradictiously.

"Well, he took salt before he offered it to you."

"And I noticed he did not offer to open the door for me," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "But perhaps in Australia these refinements are not considered important. It is a great pity to be too particular."

"I shouldn't say he was a man to bother himself about small matters, good or bad,"

said Mildmay, smiling. "He's one of your rough diamonds."

"*Is* he a diamond?" questioned Aglae of herself, as the subject dropped.

When they came down to breakfast next morning the table that Quekett generally used was occupied by a new group. Aglae could not help glancing towards it as she took her seat. Whether she had made any unusual effort at her toilet that morning I cannot say, nor did it occur to any one to inquire; but never breathed a sweeter thing than Aglae looked in her soft green morning robe, her burnished hair and soft hazel eyes enhanced in lustre by the colour, and by a little wisp of ancient lace that closed round her small white throat. Mildmay's heart thrilled at the sight of her, and he was inly grateful to the American fashion which sows a coffee-room with mirrors. The reflection of that *svelte* sweet form could not be too often repeated.

"What is Mr. Quekett's number?" asked Mrs. Dorriforth of the *garçon*, meditating possibly some three-cornered note.

"Mr. Quekett, madame? Mr. Quekett and

the lady both left by the eight o'clock express this morning."

In spite of herself, not to say Sylvain, Aglae's heart gave a little throb of surprise. Evidently to Henry Quekett, at least, her will was not law.

Mrs. Dorriforth was still questioning the waiter. "But the gentleman I mean is not a married gentleman. Are you quite sure he left?"

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. "There was a lady with him in the omnibus, and a maid. Perfectly sure the number was vacant now."

CHAPTER VI

A DART OF FIRE

"So dark a forethought rolled about my brain
As on a dull day, in an ocean cave,
The blind wave feeling round his long sea hall
In silence."

HENRY QUEKETT did call on Mrs. Dorriforth in London when advancing summer, and crowds of "Cook's," chased them from Switzerland, and dined with them once or twice in Berkeley Square before they returned to Wales.

Mrs. Dorriforth usually spent part of the winter and spring in the modern Babylon, but loved her country house too well to live elsewhere in summer. This particular season she stayed in town only long enough to overhaul her wardrobe and Aglae's, in which her trousseau had to be considered, and then they returned to Bangor, where the faithful Major

promised to spend every hour that he could call his own.

Mr. Quekett did not advance particularly in Aglae's good opinion. Once in Mildmay's absence, once in his company, the new friend spent an evening with Aglae under the most propitious circumstances, and never once betrayed a desire to increase his acquaintance with her. For any woman who knows herself lovely, and is accustomed to be made much of, this kind of tacit condemnation is difficult to bear. Aglae was not vain enough to be hurt by it, but she was, it is useless to deny, a little piqued, and as his conversations with the elders were not brilliant enough to make her envious, she began to trouble herself less about him, and to take refuge more in silence and embroidery.

Yet at times Mr. Quekett could be charming enough. Now and again a word, a look, or the rare little glittering smile in her direction, smoothed her ruffled feathers, and brought back the romantic view of him which had possessed her in Switzerland. There was certainly a sort of charm about this Australian

waif, and the Dorriforths were gratified to hear that he meditated a long stay in England at the snug small house which had descended to him by his father's will.

"He might be a very pleasant neighbour if he married a nice young wife," said maternal Mrs. Dorriforth. "He cleared four thousand acres in Melbourne."

"His clearing acres won't win him a wife, aunt," said Aglae, at this characteristically inconsequent remark.

On the second evening when Quekett dined with the Dorriforths, Major Mildmay not being there, Aglae was completely left out in the cold. She did her best to amuse two old gentlemen who formed the whole man-kind of the guests; and when all were departed except Mr. Quekett, who loved late hours, she felt the absence of a *preux chevalier* very much. The calm guest had been particularly deaf and blind to Aglae's attractions that evening; and though she spent unusual efforts on her old men, they seemed to excite only deeper indifference in Mr. Quekett. She caught herself reflecting, "If being engaged means never

getting common civility from any other man, it is a very bad look-out for engaged girls."

She had time to find her crewels, settle down, and do a whole flower while Mr. Dorriforth first dozed, then slunk away to his insects, and Mrs. Dorriforth crooned with Mr. Quekett; she only wished she could go off to bed without saying good-night.

Mrs. Dorriforth broke up the group after a time to fetch something for Mr. Quekett's benefit; and Henry used the chance opportunity to turn to Aglae, whose bronze head was bowed over delicate hues of the School of Art; she was at last oblivious of him.

"You are going back to Bangor soon, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes," answered Aglae, laconically. *She* wasn't going to trouble herself.

"May I come and see you there?"

"*Me!*" cried Aglae, in a sudden flutter; and then, vexed that she should have been unprepared for so simple a question, she added, "We shall be very pleased if you will come down sometimes."

Quekett let his eyes rest on her without

speaking again. There was no eagerness in his manner, it was chiefly contemplative, but she felt the examination going on, and could not help raising her own; though she had vowed in herself she would not *look* at him again to-night.

The penetrating eyes of Quekett met hers, and, as often before, a little shock sent a blush to her cheeks and brow. She could see that he was saying inwardly, "What are you colouring for? what have I said?" and was so angry with herself that she got up, spilling all her wools and needles, and walked to the other end of the room.

Of course, Mr. Quekett did not pick up the wools. He never did that sort of thing. So they remained on the carpet, disagreeable witness of a most uncalled-for commotion; and Aglae tried to calm her still fluttering breath.

While Aglae let off a little steam secretly by winding up the blind, that the long line of moonlight might widen on the floor, a minute speck darted across the room into the corner where Henry stood watching her. Aglae turned her face towards it.

"Good God! a mouse!" said Henry, as his quick eye caught the movement; and quicker than thought, his foot put an end to one thing's agony of suspense.

Aglae's momentary irritation was lost in horror. For a moment she could not breathe, could not speak; the crunch seemed upon her heart.

She sprang towards him. "It was a mouse!" she stammered as soon as she could find utterance.

"A mouse, yes," said Quekett quietly. "I don't like mice."

"You put your foot upon a mouse!"

"Why not? there are other mice," said Quekett.

"How can you," gasped Aglae, all shivering, "put your foot on a mouse?"

"So," said Mr. Quekett, again flattening the poor little mass.

"I shall not get it out of my head for a year," cried Aglae. Any one else she would have loaded with reproaches, but this imperturbable man communicated his calmness to others somehow, and she could not say more

than, "I shall not get it out of my head for a year!"

Seeing how utterly shocked she was, Quekett felt some excuse due.

"I would not have done it," he said, "if I had known it would put you out so," and he drew a chair forward for her. "But I have a great dislike to mice. Many women have too."

"I don't like mice about," said poor Aglae, at a loss; "but to put one's foot——"

"Pray sit down," he said, lightly taking her by the arm; his touch was so quiet and light that it soothed her in spite of herself. In a minute or so he spoke again, with that little smile which sent all her anger rolling away like a morning mist. "Good-night," he said.

"Good-night," said Aglae, for the moment of his smile forgetful of what she had been so angry for, and Henry Quekett was gone.

Mrs. Dorriforth came back a moment after, with a book in her hand.

"What have you done with Mr. Quekett? Gone! What a very odd man! Why, he asked for this very book, and when I bring it I find him gone. Very rude, Aglae."

"Rude?" said Aglae absently. "I suppose he forgot. I cannot help it. Aunt Dorry, if Mr. Quekett had a wife, I believe he would beat her."

"Beat his wife, my dear; what makes you think so?"

"He looks as if he would. Auntie, he has squashed a mouse with his foot!"

All night the strange mixture in this man tormented Aglae's brain. "A live mouse! as though it were a berry. And all the evening he scarcely opened his mouth to me. There is something deadly-lively about him, all but his smile, which startles one. Ah, why did he touch me? I had no need to be so near the wretch; and I could have gone on hating him. Oh, it was not real feeling, when he touched me so. I think he was only measuring the size of my arm. I am certain that he will beat his wife."

CHAPTER VII

FANNED TO A BLAZE

"The shadow of his presence made my world
A paradise. All familiar things he touched,
All common words he spoke, became to me
Like forms and sounds of a diviner world."

SHELLEY.

MR. QUEKETT rented a pretty lodge a few miles from Bangor, in order to judge, he said, how life *en permanence* in Wales would suit him. He was never without company. Friends from London and Australia joined him, and helped him no doubt to form his opinion of the place, and make up his future plans. Some few of the neighbouring gentry, whose acquaintance he had made, swelled his bachelor parties, rowed on his pond, and darted about his lawns during the lawn-tennis tournaments. Mrs. Dorriforth and Aglae went once or twice; they found in Quekett an agreeable host, who,

without a large amount of conversational power, possessed considerable *savoir faire*, and helped his guests to do very much as they liked.

Aglae was so far the handsomest woman at any neighbouring "garden of girls," that she was surrounded more than she quite enjoyed by everybody who was not the host. The host by no means pursued her openly. She saw remarkably little of him, and then he said little enough. He dined from time to time with the Dorriforths—in fact, whenever they asked him, whether he had company at his own house or not.

Without Sylvain, these dinners flagged in brightness. Mr. Quekett was so eminently unenthusiastic, in spite of some indefinable atmosphere of romance or oddness that he possessed for Aglae. She was angry with herself for looking forward to his visits, she who belonged to another. What did she want?

One May night he came, and Mildmay was so bright and cheery, that even Quekett roused up into sallies of something like wit, and his sudden little smile was oftener seen. After dinner he asked Mr. Dorriforth if smoking

was allowed in the garden, and they all moved forth into the lucid evening air, the men with cigars, the ladies with light shawls, and they naturally detached themselves into couples as mutual attraction determined.

Aglae strolled along by Henry Quekett's side, down the garden, round the field, through the rhododendron walk, now listening to him when he spoke between the puffs of his cigar, now keeping up the ball herself by means of various odds and ends of talk—not without a sense that the meagre and insipid subjects for conversation that alone supplied her mind must be boring indeed to this strong man, with calm self-contained eyes that told her nothing, and the small, set mouth that closed round the big cigar during such long silences.

What a strange man he was! What calm, resolute lines made his broad face so utter a contrast to Sylvain's delicate, humorous, bearded mouth, and kind eloquent eyes. This man, too, had a slight mist of beard, not reaching to his mouth on either side, light brown, unlike his close dark hair. His teeth were slightly separated; she could see them

every now and then like small cat's teeth, when he blew away the smoke of his cigar. Once or twice he looked at her; but never did he show whether her small running fire of talk interested or annoyed him. A damp fell on her spirits as they reached the smoking arbour, and she felt a sort of disappointed longing for Sylvain's ever-ready social gifts to stop the yawning gap. She could see him entering the house with Mrs. Dorriforth.

Henry turned into the smoking arbour without a word as they reached its entrance. Aglae stopped, astonished, for an instant, and instinctively followed him the next. He stood with his foot upon the oak-stump, carefully detaching the last remnant of ash from his cigar against the trellis. Aglae was conscious of watching the process with a concentrated interest wholly out of proportion to its importance. Then he tossed the fragment away.

"Come here," said he.

Aglae came, quite unreasoning.

"Closer."

Being already within a yard of him, she stammered something which he ignored. He

put out his hand and drew her first by one hand, then both. Aglae felt his heart beating; it seemed to her in the sudden crisis of excited feeling that she felt his whole blood circulate. She was breathless, electrified by the abrupt change in his bearing.

"Now you may kiss me," said Quekett, bending his eyes upon her, stilly, yet with a glow that fascinated and transported her, in the midst of her disgust at having come into the arbour at all.

Aglae was conscious of struggling helplessly, and feeling as incapable as a small bird in a vice. "Don't," he said, hardly lowering his voice. "Mildmay can't see you. Do as I tell you."

Once more she tried to speak, but no words would come, and in that close grip, she could remember nothing but his face, that face which did not stoop to her, did not kiss her, but commanded her vassalage like a king.

"Kiss me." And Aglae knew, as though she were witness to some other person, that in her violent effort to turn her head away, her head moved in opposition to her will; it was

automatic action that she could not command. She knew there was a fierce little mouth on hers, that she had obeyed, and that she was supported in the mouse-squasher's arms without the remotest recollection that she ought to move away.

Henry set her on her feet as he might have set a child that he had been playing with, and took her by the chin. "You know you like it. You know you want to marry me. What are you saying? Engaged to Mildmay? I know. But you are going to marry *me*." Aglae, rooted to the ground in a state of exaltation liker hypnotism than anything she had ever experienced, heard the next words as in a dream.

"Go in now; and you can tell your aunt what a naughty girl you are going to be."

It was the wooing of a brute, not of a man; but something in Aglae answered to it; she was subjugated, she was exalted, she was under a spell. How she found herself in her own room she never knew. She must have walked, of course; and as she turned her eyes to the window to assure herself that the

garden, the whole world, was not already upside down, she saw the massive figure saunter up from the arbour to the terrace, the inevitable cigar between his lips, and no sign which told of the loot which Mildmay had suffered within the jessamine walls, by a few brief syllables of his, and hardly two minutes of time.

The first sane idea which occurred to Aglae was, what Sylvain would say. How to confess this to Sylvain—what he would think of her—she did not know. The "spirit" of her new lover was "upon her," so that she was incapable of contemplating possibilities.

She felt as though she had broken out of a cage, the cage of a smooth, decorous affection; and was at sweet liberty in the broad fields of endless air. At last she saw that her love for Sylvain was not perfect; something which she had never known before she seemed to know now, and Quekett, not Mildmay, had given her her wings. The one thing which she was profoundly thankful for was that she was still unmarried, and had the power still to choose her fate and spare Sylvain something. Yet she was painfully sensible that some explana-

tion was due to Sylvain: for the thought of concealing anything from him never occurred to her.

Aglae had a terribly excited, sleepless night, which could not, however, be called a wretched one, since it was past in incessantly revolving and repeating the words and looks of this extraordinary man. Every syllable had been burnt into her brain. "Come here; closer;" and again: "You know you want to marry me. Engaged to Mildmay? But you are going to marry *me*." Strange that these words, oft reiterated all that night, never once impressed her with their full force of meaning. She never realized at all that he intended her to dissolve her engagement, and had resolved to make her his wife. What alone was clear to Aglae was, that she had never felt in Sylvain's presence what she felt now.

"I am going off to Thorpe to-day," said Sylvain, "so we shall not have a very long time together this morning."

"To Thorpe?" cried Aglae, remembering for the first time how little she had seen of Mildmay on the previous night. "To Thorpe,

so suddenly? You said nothing about it yesterday."

"Partly," said Mildmay. "So I came round in good time; I thought you might have something to say to me."

"Something to say?" What an expression!—and now her heart was beginning to choke her again.

"For how long are you going?" she asked presently.

"That depends." Then came a long pause.

Mildmay took up Aglae's hands—what little delicate hands!—and lifted them together to his lips. "You look so awfully pretty this morning," he said, looking at her; and looking, she felt, at the tide of crimson that swept over her face at words which fell on her ear like a rebuke.

She did look pretty. Her gown of some rough stuff, apricot-coloured, with a dark border, defined her shapely figure from head to foot against the dull oak of the bay window wherein she sat; round her neck a slight gold chain closed by a lock of gold, this set with one black pearl, Mildmay's gift upon their

engagement, broke the even line of the frill about her throat—such a throat, small and creamy, made to kiss. Aglae drew away her hands from Sylvain's, and clasped them with a sigh behind her head; the action drew a wisp of her chestnut hair over her tucker like a murky cloud, and he watched the clear hazel eyes, like amber in their pellucid depth, wander far away over the pale morning landscape, not mournful at his going, but troubled with some unuttered thought.

How pretty, how lovable she was, Sylvain's heart was telling him; but under this fleshly beauty what strength and courage, what moral vigour were latent? Would such a wife develop or deteriorate? Would the sweetness ripen or fail? Was it possible, as Mr. Dorriforth had once said, haphazard, that the Soul could be clogged, *déchu*, by the lower nature?

Something questioning or unsympathetic for the moment in Sylvain's face gave Aglae nerve for the fatal plunge.

"Sylvain," she said, stooping forward almost breathlessly, "a woman that loves a man as she ought when she has given her promise,

. . . she ought to be his very wholly, . . . nothing ought ever to come between them."

"She *is* his wholly; and nothing does come between them," answered he.

"She thinks of him always, before every one else? No one else comes into her mind in the same fashion—she is virtually married?"

"She is virtually married," said Sylvain.

"But if . . . are all people that are engaged like that?"

"No." And he saw something brighten in her face. But he said no more.

"If I loved you *properly*, Sylvain—if I were worthy, . . . no one else, no other prospect would seem possible to me—no reluctance, no questioning—and I should be, oh! so happy, should I not, Sylvain?"

"If you loved me, Aglae, you would never have asked the question," said Sylvain. She did not dare to look in his face. He was so moved, yet so prepared, so firm, that she was frightened. But she did not swerve; she gained force.

"Sylvain," she said more steadily, "I am fond of you, I shall always be that; but new

thoughts come to me which I cannot keep down. I am fond of you, but it would not be fair to you if I married you with anything hidden from you upon my mind. I have thought of it all night. I don't think I want to marry. You are too good for me;" and the tears sprang to her eyes. "You don't know, you don't know," she repeated sorrowfully.

"I do know, Aglae," said Sylvain, rising and standing close to her, "and it is because I know that I say at length that it is better that we should both be free. Do you suppose," he went on hurriedly, and in rather a husky voice, "that I haven't seen and felt it? I knew you never loved me as I did you, but I hoped it would come; and during the last three months I knew in my heart—only I wouldn't realize it—that you could never do it. I hardly knew why I was so madly eager to come here this morning—so eager to leave Bangor—or why I felt that you would have something to say to me which I should have to get over some time. But I did. And it is better so, Aglae. You are free now."

"No, no," cried Aglae, quite overcome, and

hardly conscious of what she said. "I will not give you up."

"No, I give *you* up," said Sylvain. "It is I—*I* break it off. I will not marry you. Best so, my child."

"No, no, you are not in earnest," said Aglae through her tears, and weeping more because of the secret gladness that made itself felt in her. "Are you in earnest, for good and all, Sylvain?"

"I am, before God," said Mildmay gravely. "Mrs. Dorriforth is coming; let us say it out at once. On my side it is no sudden thing."

"I have made you unhappy, then, a long time," sobbed Aglae. "I who never made any one unhappy before! Forgive me, Sylvain."

"You couldn't help it," said Mildmay, almost under his breath.

Aglae rose, seeing her aunt enter; and took the black pearl from her throat and gave it him, and he heard her whisper again an entreaty—"Forgive me, forgive me, Sylvain." He pressed her hand for yes; for no inward

joy was strengthening *him*, and the effort to speak was becoming intolerable.

Mrs. Dorriforth perceived that something was wrong directly they were in range of her spectacles, and the shock was so sudden and so painful to her soft old heart, that she too could find no words for inquiry or remark. Aglae had her handkerchief pressed over her eyes, and the lovers were standing hand in hand as before some terrible altar that they saw close to them, and they alone. Mildmay broke silence.

"You see that something has happened, Mrs. Dorriforth," he said. "We have been talking over matters, and we are agreed that the engagement, which had become a mutual burden, were best dissolved. It *is* dissolved."

"Dissolved, Sylvain!" gasped Mrs. Dorriforth, dropping into her chair as if she had been shot. "What do you mean? Have you quarrelled?"

"Far from it," answered Sylvain. "We are so fully agreed."

"My children, make it up," said Mrs. Dorri-

forth, incoherently, in her utter perplexity. "Don't quarrel. It is too serious a thing."

"It *is* serious," said Sylvain, placing his hands on his kind friend's shoulders. "I had looked forward to things ending very differently; but do not persist in thinking this a quarrel—do not pain me, Mrs. Dorriforth; it is far better that we should both be free, it is for the happiness of us both, and it is final. I am going down to my people to-day. Think of me, dear friend, and don't be hard upon me. I can't bear it," and his voice quite broke.

"Aglae, Aglae, what have you done?"

"Before heaven, nothing," interrupted he. "It is I who wish to break it off, because I know it will be for her happiness. I have felt it more or less for a long time. It is no sudden thing. I will not marry her."

He turned suddenly to Aglae. "Shake hands in token of farewell, and of a friendship, in spite of what has passed, that I pray may last our lives. Good-bye."

"Oh, Sylvain!" wept Aglae, "if I should change, if I love you again as I . . . ." She felt ashamed of the puerilities which kept

coming to her tongue to convey her reluctance to lose him entirely, this man she had loved.

"Don't play fast and loose, Aglae," said Mildmay sternly. "The step is taken, and we will not go back."

"But you do not say—you do not ask me . . . it is like deceiving you, Sylvain. I would rather tell you."

"I ask nothing—I am not deceived—I do not wish to know," he said; "what I have done, I have done." He pressed Mrs. Dorriforth's hand as she sat still mystified, shocked, broken-hearted; and held out his own to Aglae, who now looked up with earnest purpose in her eyes.

"Sylvain, God bless you wherever you go."

Mildmay's self-control failed him then, and he caught her so passionately in his arms that he hurt her, so that she cried out. She saw and heard his lips frame words, but they were thick, and unintelligible to her, and the next minute his long swinging step, so well known, so often welcome, during many months, was out of hearing.

Aglae was roused from a kind of trance by

Mrs. Dorriforth's uncontrolled sobs. "Child, child, if you had seen his face as he passed me! You have broken his heart."

"Ah, auntie, how can I help it?" cried the girl, laying her bronze head down on the table. "I feel as if I had lost some beautiful estate, and my children would curse me for it."

"I feel as if you had signed your death-warrant, Aglae. You have thrown over the happiness and safeguard of your life, and God will curse you for it."

* * * * *

"John, it is all over between those two," said Mrs. Dorriforth, who flew to finish her lamentation in Mr. Dorriforth's study. Mr. Dorriforth was deep in the dissection of Madagascar coleoptera, and had just upset the ink all over the creatures at the most interesting juncture. Scientific absorption was deaf and blind to human sufferings.

"Chut! chut! it isn't two, one's bad enough," grumbled he. "Don't make a fuss: I saw it all long ago. It has completely settled her abdomen, which is the worst thing that could have happened to her."

"Whose abdomen?" said Mrs. Dorriforth irritably. "Why don't you give your mind to such a calamity for one minute, John?"

"Don't I tell you I *know*, my dear?"

"Well, if you know, can't you do something?"

"God bless my soul, how these women worry one! There, there," and he sopped up the ink with his pocket-handkerchief.

This ominous action brought out Mrs. Dorriforth's spectacles, and she saw what his head was running on. "Oh, you may soak the whole house in ink to-day if you like," she said despairingly. "You may destroy all the best handkerchiefs. You may blow the roof off! It was Aglae and Sylvain I meant. I will not move till I have made you listen."

Thus goaded, the naturalist shifted back his chair with a meek sigh, for Mrs. Dorriforth, roused, was redoubtable. And having presently realized what *her* idea of "calamity" had been, he too was moved and shocked.

But he did not afford her the help she had hoped for. He saw that it was no case for interference; no common quarrel, but a well-

considered, final breaking of the engagement. "They are not children, wife," he said, "and Mildmay is incapable of trifling with her or of deceiving himself. Let things be, and take comfort in thinking it is likely enough for the best. Wife, there are sides of Aglae's character quite unawakened as yet, that could scarcely be developed in her narrow life here. She'll grow, she'll grow. Mildmay may know her better than we do."

"But we have been always with her, John."

"None know us so little as those who are too much with us," said Mr. Dorriforth. "Give me another clear hour with this beast, there's a good soul, and I'll come and talk it over again with you."

CHAPTER VIII

THE TORCH OF EROS

"He was so awful, yet
So beautiful in mystery, and terror."

THE first brunt of regret at Sylvain's prompt decision being over, Aglae gave herself up once more to the thoughts which had made her their prey. Henry Quekett filled her mind with delicious fears and hopes. She trembled at the idea of meeting him again; yet every bell at the hall-door, every step on the gravel made her heart beat with longing. To her great astonishment, however, Mr. Quekett did not come nigh her. She had been fully persuaded that he would come next day and pay her a visit; how fully, she could weigh only by the measure of disappointment with which she went to bed each evening.

Often Mrs. Dorriforth had sought to extract

from Aglae some avowal which might throw more light on Sylvain's withdrawal, but without any desire to deceive, Aglae's reticence shrank from describing to any one the singular abruptness of Quekett's conquest over her; and she could only reiterate, "He felt what I feel now, that I do not love him enough. I ought not to marry him." At the same time, she had been bound by Henry by no promise, had been asked no consent; she was not engaged to him; whether he loved her or no, she could not force her nature into its old equilibrium. She was his handmaid, not his queen; ready to be taken or left at his will; content, too, with her subordinate position, thankful for a little.

From time to time they heard of Quekett; he was still in Bangor, amusing himself, kinglike, with garden parties and other sport. He was not far off, yet he made no attempt to see Aglae. The suspense and pain were becoming very sharp to her, for though he was not hers, she was conscious of loving him madly, and her colour was fading under the days of delayed expectation.

At the end of a week, however, Mr. Quekett was announced one morning. He had not asked for Aglae, but for Mrs. Dorriforth, who had been his hostess recently. But Mrs. Dorriforth was engaged, and wished Aglae to receive him until she was at liberty.

Aglae went down, pale and tremulous like the morning star, and deeply desirous not to make an idiot of herself; as she knew she had done most emphatically not long ago. She greeted him with some ordinary phrases of welcome, and did try very hard not to let her fingers tremble or her cheeks flush.

Henry Quekett took her hand as she approached. Then he waited, staring at her. Then he drew her nearer, and chucked her beneath the chin. This completely overthrew all Aglae's notions, and between her emotions of shyness and joy, she laughed. Quekett laughed too, and kissed her now, this time getting nothing but teeth, dominating her in his strange way, which so shook her that tears followed the smile. "You look very pretty when you laugh, and when you cry too," said Quekett—Mildmay's words, with a

difference—"I like a pretty face"—as he might have said, "I don't like mice."

"I suppose you guess why I have come to-day," he went on in his imperturbable manner, lifting up her chin coolly with his finger, so as to bring the little face better within reach.

"You did not ask for me," cried Aglae, a little resentfully, though her heart beat enough to shake her equilibrium.

"No, why should I? I know all about *you*. I wanted to see your aunt about it. I suppose you have broken with Mildmay by now?"

Aglae nodded her downcast head. She was half ashamed to say yes.

"Good girl. Is your aunt coming presently?"

"Yes, I believe so," said Aglae, blushing up again.

"I thought she was Number One in the house. Mr. Dorriforth is always up in the clouds, isn't he? Sort of 'higher education.' I don't like higher education. The earth-plane is good enough for me.—Isn't he?"

"A good deal," said Aglae, laughing again; and just as Mr. Quekett stooped to express his approbation of the pretty smile, Mrs. Dorriforth entered the room, and saw the embrace. This was by no means a thing to disconcert Henry Quekett.

He went up to Mrs. Dorriforth with perfect *aplomb*. "*A la bonne heure*," said he. "I have been wishing to pay my respects to you for some days, but I have been prevented, and I desired to tell you how much I wish to possess your consent, and that of Mr. Dorriforth, to my marrying your niece. I wish to make her my wife."

Poor Mrs. Dorriforth! Hardly less aghast at this than she had been at that other sudden announcement, she was still perfectly conscious of Quekett's mind. It would be of little use were she or half the world to throw obstacles in Henry Quekett's way. He meant, "I intend to marry Aglae. I prefer that matters should be smooth, but if not, I do not care a snap of the fingers."

Mrs. Dorriforth looked at Aglae, half inquiring, half suspicious. Was this a plot, and

Mildmay's *congé* one chapter of it? Would Aglae's womanly dignity suffer under this deliberate claim of her; unlike a suppliant, as Mildmay had been, rather like a victor who demanded, though it was done civilly?

But Aglae's countenance reassured her. No resentment, no amazement sat upon her face, but rather joy, gratitude, humility.

"Neither I nor my husband will ever stand in the way of Aglae's happiness, I trust," answered Mrs. Dorriforth somewhat icily. "I suppose Mr. Quekett is aware of my niece's recent release from her engagement?"

"To Major Mildmay: quite so," said Quekett. "But I am much nicer than Mildmay, she thinks," and he looked over at Aglaé with his little sudden smile.

No doubt, there was no more to be done. They understood each other, Aglae was happy; but this free-and-easy way of taking possession of a girl, like an empty house, went greatly against the good lady's grain; Aglae, an acknowledged beauty, whom so many had sought, to be won like a savage woman! Mrs. Dorriforth had never liked Quekett less than

now; she was fervently anxious to secure her darling's peace and prosperity, but she could *not* feel quite sympathetic to order. This rapid shifting of scenes appeared to her actually indelicate; to be "off with the old love and on with the new" in one short week, was not like a girl with any feeling of rectitude; she could think of nothing kinder to say than "Child, please yourself, and may God bless you," and her tone sounded cold even to her own ears.

* * * * *

Thus Aglaë, transformed from her old self to a new creature in an incredibly short space, threw over her calm, serene, maidenly life for one made of fire and snow, the womanly passion for the first time felt, matured, even as the gourd of Jonah, in a single night, and believed herself blest of all the gods. Never once did she repent. She desired to retain Sylvain's affection as friend, brother, what you will, but not lover; her heart was set upon the man who had mastered and commanded her, and who in her eyes was without spot or blemish.

One of the most terrible facts connected with our complex organization is the latent brute that is in every one, even the gentlest and simplest. At some time or other is sure to be found the forgotten germ of mere animal kind which ages of culture have failed to destroy. There it lies, clothed upon by mental lustre, buried under long-acquired moral habits, exhausted by neglect—yet, it is not dead. The natural cruelty of children; the love of inflicting pain for the pleasurable sense of power involved, which in every babe needs to be re-checked; the lurking reverence for physical virtues, muscular strength, brute courage, are just so many indications of its presence. In the weak and timid girl something answers to the fierce instincts of the man; in the shy student the physical interest of rapine and bloodshed creeps and palpitates till he is sometimes at a loss whence to derive it. There is a subtle contagion even in common deeds of violence, which repeat themselves almost without a cause; a fact which science has yet to explain. The very terms which we apply to moral actions are

borrowed from physical ones, never the reverse: strong, great, masterful are our highest superlatives; Deity's self is called "All-mighty." The body's power to rule, to enjoy, to continue, underlies all creeds and all characters.

This hypothesis alone accounts for the recorded instances of people who might know better, sacrificing culture to force, beauty to coarseness, refinement to ferocity, comfort to hardship. It is the secret supremacy of the wild creature surviving civilization, and having its part in us all. There is no subject more puzzling to metaphysical speculation, or more attractive for romantic treatment, than the apparent anomalies in human character; for what may seem the aberrant and monstrous product of a hitherto consistent character is often but the normal development of one side of it.

From Sylvain not a word was heard. He did not write to Bangor, and seemed to have disappeared as completely as snow in summer. A member of his family, who, possessing some very unusual human qualities, did not think

fit to blame or dislike Aglae after what had happened, wrote to Mrs. Dorriforth to express regret at the course which had been deemed wise by the parties concerned. One mention of Sylvain the letter contained:—

"Poor Sylvain, he was very much cut up. I suppose you know he sailed for Calcutta a few days after he left you. A post he likes, in the museum there, the botanical department, will be vacant before long."

What a world of reproach, Aglae felt, lay in that sudden flight back to the dusty life he had so shrunk from!—though Sylvain had not meant she should feel it such.

CHAPTER IX

MEADOWS OF ASPHODEL

"Dandirly, dandirly, dandirly dan,
She shall marry a proper man;
Dandirly, dandirly, dandirly dan,
When the woods are green!"

AGLAE was married in the summer, "when the woods are green," as that strange song had foretold last year when all the boughs were brown. It was August. All Bangor crowded into the tiny cathedral and into the close, to see her float like a white cloud up the aisle and down again to her carriage.

It was a matter of regret both to Mrs. Dorriforth and Aglae, that she was to be parted very completely from her old life. It had been hoped, and almost decided that the Queketts should settle in Wales, not far from Bangor; but Mr. Quekett wished to be

near London, and as Aglae understood the necessity for a man's being within reach of the whip of civilization, she gave in without a murmur; and, after a brief honeymoon at the most secluded place they could find—a seaside village, whose seclusion, as we have seen, had charms for other hearts than happy ones—she made her home contentedly at The Laurels, East Barnet, whence the frequent trains, or a swift horse and trap, took them to London in a very short time.

The *rencontre* in the cornfield, awkward as it was, did not displease any of the three. Aglae was too happy not to be glad to make a general peace with her discarded Sylvain. Mildmay—too proud and too sore to seek a meeting—was thankful only to be able to tell her he was her friend, for his judgment of Mr. Quekett's character was naturally less roseate than the bride's. And as for Mr. Quekett himself, it enabled him to strike a decisive blow in good time at the root of future inconveniences. It is as well for brides to know betimes whether they or the bridegrooms are to brandish the whip-handle; and

for former lovers to understand their position before mistakes can occur.

Most girls have a great deal to learn when they first have a house of their own. Much more than a course of lessons in cookery at Kensington, nay, than years of "housekeeping" in the maiden home can teach. The responsibility of the comfort and general tone of the entire household, the unending yoke of duties never to be shifted to a deputy, the strange, gradual understanding of a man's view of life and a man's liberty of action, these are the hardest lessons for girls to acquire. Aglae made fewer mistakes than many brides, for her engagement to Mildmay had taught her something, and as she yielded implicitly in all things to Quekett,—stood on his feet, saw with his eyes, had scarcely faculties of her own—there was no room for quarrels or heart-burnings to dim the sunshine. "I like a wife to *be* a wife," said Mr. Quekett. "None of your new women. She has got to see eye to eye with me, and *I'll* find her brains. Women want nothing that their husbands don't give them. And Aglae's my sort."

Aglae desired nothing better!

So flew the first year. The warm *exigéance* of first love, that fierce light which beats upon bridegrooms, and which bridegrooms fret under till they see with grief that it is gone for ever, this was there, but this delighted Henry while his own passion was strong. A ruler from his cradle, he feared no chain, least of all one woven by woman. Thus the girl, who had seen little dissipation hitherto either in London or in Wales, found herself the mistress of a considerable establishment, and a mixed and wealthy circle. No woman had ever gone to the altar more filled with an earnest purpose to make happy the man she loved, no woman ever was more sure of herself. Henry, free with his money, with his gifts, with his praise, everybody pleased and contented, surely all the elements of happiness were present. The marriage was made in heaven.

Mrs. Dorriforth had the satisfaction of seeing Aglae within a few months of her marriage. She went to stay a few days at The Laurels, for Aglae was suffering somewhat, and not fit to take a long journey herself. Mrs. Dorriforth

found her languid and exhausted, but as happy as a queen, delighted with her new life, and as much in love as ever; and as for Henry, he was rapturously in love still, rather pitiless in his demands upon her strength, considering how unused she was to much company and fatigue, but proud of the exquisite beauty he had secured, and tireless of showing her to all his friends new and old, and vaunting her talents and charms. Every day and all day long there were lunches, at homes, dinners. She was presented at Court in the spring, and taken to London balls night after night. A tyrant he was, no doubt, whose passion, like a ribbon around a bull's neck, gave him the semblance of slavery without the tameness of a slave.

This constituted a chief charm in his wife's eyes, just as we love risk and enjoy compulsion. Does not a woman despise an obedient lover? All the books—the old books—tell us so.

"And do you still think Henry will beat his wife?" Mrs. Dorriforth had asked Aglae on the eve of her wedding, remembering a past episode of displeasure.

"Ah, aunt—*if he didn't love her*," said Aglae. "And I wouldn't mind a beating from a man I loved." Such is the mood of a happy wife in a happy home.

Mrs. Dorriforth, however, had a new anxiety to occupy her mind. Mr. Dorriforth's health was giving way in an unmistakable manner. He was much older than his wife, and had had his normal human rations of good health during earlier years. He was ordered to the South of France, then to Naples, then to Nice, whither his wife and bottles accompanied him. And there he dwelt, and dissected, and moralized, and got worse and better, and better and worse, for a year—two years—and more, till a longing almost passionate in its intensity began to prey upon Mrs. Dorriforth's tender heart.

It had often been projected that Aglae and Henry should join them at one of their sunny resting-places. Aglae had never been out of England but once, unless Wales be counted as another kingdom, and she was most anxious to see Italy. But Mr. Quekett said he had had enough of Italy, and so the

whole thing ended in smoke, and the gay, sanguine letters from Aglae, frequent and punctual at first, but gradually rarer, full of the old repetitions and home-news and chronic names, Wileys who knew Henry in Geneva, Carrington who knew him in Melbourne, Pringle and Simpson, Brown, Jones, and Robinson—had to console them. When the letters came, Mrs. Dorriforth read them to her John. When they did not come, she affirmed with equable contentment that letter-writing was great waste of time and money, and that as wives grew older, and the home duties began to occupy more time, without changing at all in character, wives were naturally less given to scribbling without something particular to say. "If anything were going wrong we should hear, fast enough," said the wise and bonny little aunt; "but the child is as settled as Cheops, and has nothing to say but how happy she is, and what servants are going and coming."

"She has done very well for herself, apparently," said Mr. Dorriforth—whose face was screwed into a mere frame for a magnify-

ing-glass—"much as you were against Sylvain's departure."

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Dorriforth—always beside him to watch that he did not get a chill or a sunstroke as he poked about, less actively than of yore, but still with zest,—"I *did* like Sylvain best, poor boy—so much best—and I loved his mother dearly. But there is something very fine and manly about Henry. Don't you remember what Aglae said in her last about the vicious horse? Here I have it: 'The horse has always been an unmanageable brute, and bit and tore everything it came near sometimes. After that last accident to the groom, Henry undertook to "break" the creature, and like every other creature that comes in contact with his will, it had to give in. I saw it come out of the stable shaking and wet all over. He *said* he had not done it by the whip. But I have seen him thrash a horse!'"

"I can believe that. His father was a man of iron; his mother had reserves of strength under her frivolous manner. Hal Quekett

(the father) could turn a *broncho*[1] round his finger. A strange power, and no scruples. Especially with animals."

"Well, Henry doesn't turn Aglae round his finger, *broncho* or no," says auntie, always on the alert to glorify her idol.

"How do you know?"

"Because she wouldn't have it, she has too much spirit," said Mrs. Dorriforth.

"I asked you how you know, I didn't ask if she had spirit," said Mr. Dorriforth, chuckling. "Some one must be master in the house. It isn't anybody but Henry in Henry's house. He is capable of managing six wives, like his namesake."

"Well, I am sure he does not 'manage' Aglae, or she would tell me," says Mrs. Dorriforth. "Hear this again—how she admires him, John: 'Henry can write his name without a shake on the wall, with a hundred-pound weight hanging on his elbow, and he is one

[1] *Broncho* is a word derived from the Spanish, used in America for a breed of horses which are too vicious to be broken in.

of the crack shots at Hurlingham, so we are pretty safe from burglars. He says he once gave a giant a death-hug, only in play. Captain Carrington says Henry was reputed the best man of business in New South Wales. Henry can blow the Alpen-horn deafeningly, with hardly an effort.' Isn't it pretty to see her child-like hero-worship?"

"Hero-worship, yes; but we were talking of hero-ruling, weren't we?"

"Nonsense. They are equal in their several fashions, and both happy. They want only little Psyches and King Hals to make the household an ideal one; it would be curious to see Henry's views of nursery discipline, and perhaps to see him end a tame lion. If dear Aglae were a little stronger we might hope for that, but she exerts herself too much to meet Henry's natural wish to see her shine."

"He is selfish, Henry is," said Mr. Dorriforth; "and Aglae is weak."

"Yielding," corrected Aunt Dorriforth, in a pet. "Much you'd like a wife who wasn't! It is quite time to be getting back. Where have you buried your scarf, and your coat,

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and your gloves? You know the Neapolitans told us the malaria is most easily caught in the palms of the hands!" Upon which Mr. Dorriforth, meeker far than of yore, was bundled into the carriage, gloves and all, as a judgment for maintaining that his niece was made of flesh and blood.

The life of an invalid at Nice, Pau, San Remo, or any other fashionable hospital, is hardly interesting enough to any but a relative, to be worth while tracing here. Aglae was glad enough of details about her uncle's health, and received them regularly, whether she answered them or no. Her life was a gay one, if festivities could make it so; but she had long ceased enumerating her guests with the first innocent pride which attacks brides, and her letters (in the even sunniness of her life's weather) had become almost monotonous in tone, till Mrs. Dorriforth counted up, with a kind of heart-sickness, that it was over four years since she had seen her precious Aglae. Then she was recalled by a sudden and amazing announcement that Aglae had given her husband a New Year's gift in the

shape of a fine son and heir, and wished to have "auntie" with her during her convalescence.

I leave you to judge how Mrs. Dorriforth flew to obey this request. Her delight and excitement knew no bounds. She left Mr. Dorriforth, who was equally pleased at the event and the invitation, in the care of friends made in Nice, and hurried to London as fast as express trains and mail boats could take her. She arrived safely at Dover, where she recovered the worst part of the cold and tedious journey on a cup of coffee and some sandwiches, and then resigned herself to a lady's compartment of the first class.

CHAPTER X

TONGUES OF FIRE

"Love is not olde as when that it is newe."
CHAUCER, *Griselda.*

MRS. DORRIFORTH roused herself out of a nap on hearing voices, as she thought, close in her ear. She started upright, raised her veil, found herself still alone, and perceived that the small window between the compartments was removed or broken, and that the talkers were in the next carriage. How long they had been there it was impossible to tell, for the train was still speeding along, and from the hour by her watch Mrs. Dorriforth could judge that they were well on their way to London. It is curious how automatically the brain works, and how the senses support it. The drone of a chat may go on round a sleeper for an hour, but if his name is men-

tioned, or a name dear to him, he wakes up at once, and generally vows that he has not closed an eye. In Mrs. Dorriforth's case this same thing happened.

"Oh yes, I recollect," said one voice. "I've seen her. Her name is Wiley, Mrs. Wiley: a friend of Captain Carrington's."

"Those Queketts!" said another with a laugh. "They do amuse me."

Mrs. Dorriforth pricked up her ears involuntarily. The name was a very unusual one, and she could not help being interested.

"They're an awfully queer couple," said a voice again, a lady's. "Mr. Quekett always looks like a sphinx. So does Mrs. Wiley. I don't know why, for I never saw a sphinx, you know. But I am sure he's like a sphinx. One never knows how he'll take what one says, except with a stony stare—*so*," and a laugh followed what might have been mimicry. "And as for her, *is* she nice?"—with a dubious tone.

"Nice! you're all nice!" said a man's voice in answer.

"She looks very bold and hard," said the lady's voice.

How could this be Aglae? Bold and hard were the reverse of what her Aglae *could* look.

"Some people call her pretty, but *I* can't see what there is to admire in all that browny red hair and browny red eyes. And then she says very *risqué* things."

"Delightfully cheeky."

"I knew her as a girl, as Miss——" (Mumble.)

"Well, all I can say is, then you knew as rapid a little——" (Mumble, mumble.)

The train fizzed and oscillated, and the rest was lost. They were coming to a station. Mrs. Dorriforth leaned out in spite of the risk of neuralgia, longing to see if possible the speakers that certainly had some semblance of taking Aglae's name in vain. A lady got out, no one else; the men remained behind. Mrs. Dorriforth could not see her face, and was as wise as before.

While she was meditating, in no glad mood, to the tune of rolling wheels, the confab began again.

"Oh, Joyce Pringle's a wily old bird."

"Well, she is not clever enough to get married all these years."

"Perhaps she's too clever."

(Mumble.) "Come, I say. Tell us, is *that* the new quarry?"

"Not particularly new." (Mumble, mumble.)

"Well, I could understand it. I never saw a prettier little thing than the Quekett, if she *is* flighty. And who's to blame her? Quekett can't. I could tell you——"

"Deuced bad lot, I say. It's a shame, if one isn't bullied in one's home."

"Bad form. Very reckless of appearances."

"Perhaps Quekett Junior will steady her."

This was very far from reassuring, and till the gentlemen alighted shortly after, the helpless eavesdropper was too shocked and distressed to think of anything else.

"What horrible people!" shuddered Mrs. Dorriforth, though she would have been at a loss to define the real mischief in speech that was merely disagreeable to her. They spoke a language so foreign to her habits and sympathies that it was but half intelligible,

and yet it was certainly English. Was it possible that such folk had prowled around Aglae's "set" until they had broken into it? This must be not mere backbiting, but libel; it left a miserable choking in the good aunt's throat, to recall the ugly words branded on the plate of her white mind, like images in a bad dream; the more when she contrasted them with the soft, sacred gravity of the sick-room in which Aglae lay, her ewe-lamb, with her one sweet babe in her arms.

From London, after the luggage examination, Mrs. Dorriforth had to catch the first train to Barnet, and she went through all as one in a dream, all her high spirits dashed, and nameless suspicions fighting in her mind.

But when Mrs. Dorriforth was alone with Aglae in her quiet room, the still figure on the sick couch dispelled from her mind the disagreeable impression given her by her unknown fellow-travellers. There was nothing "bold and hard" about that gentle face, so gladdened by her coming. There was little change from the sweet, lovable girl of old except in the pallor of the recent pang, and

even that was brightened from time to time by the pleasant flush of joy. Whatever and whoever the passengers might have meant, their detestable remarks did not refer to Aglae.

Many things were to be talked over after that long absence. Not only the infant Hercules, who positively rocked his own cradle when he moved, but past events, absent friends, future plans. They talked till Mrs. Dorriforth was afraid of over-tiring her niece, and till she began to feel sleepy herself. But just as she was about to withdraw Mr. Quekett came in. Not till that moment had it struck Mrs. Dorriforth that he had been utterly forgotten: not once had he figured in their long confidential chat.

He was quite unchanged, unless a little stouter; not a line was aged or altered in his impassive, haughty face. He addressed Mrs. Dorriforth with his usual calm, almost cold civility.

"I could not allow the evening to pass without greeting you, Mrs. Dorriforth. I have friends below, a smoking party. But they can amuse themselves a little while."

"I am so glad to find darling Aglae so far recovering," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "And what a splendid babe!—a second generation of Harry the Eighth."

"Yes, they are both satisfactory," said Quekett, without, however, looking at either.

He had not been a minute or two in the room, when a footman knocked at the door with a message for him. "Miss Pringle wishes to speak to you, sir."

Quekett nodded without moving a muscle. Mrs. Dorriforth, pricked to curiosity by the recurrence of the name, especially at this late hour, asked quickly, "Who is Miss Pringle, Aglae?"

"Miss Pringle," repeated Aglae with a slight change of countenance, which, however she strove to conceal it, was not unperceived by her aunt. "Oh, a friend. A very dear friend."

"Does she live in the house?"

"Not yet," said Aglae rashly.

Quekett rose, without haste, without delay, and said to his wife, "You are looking rather excited. I hope you will be better to-morrow. Give me your wrist." Aglae resisted angrily.

"Give me your wrist!" and he took it calmly and held it while he counted the beats.

Then he left the room, and while following the servant Mrs. Dorriforth fancied she heard a whispered altercation. Aglae twisted herself uneasily on her couch, and Mrs. Dorriforth, leaning on it, felt the whole sofa quiver under her. "What is the matter, darling? How is the pulse?"

"Nothing," said Aglae; but the act of speaking was too much for her. The tears were flooding her white cheeks.

"My child, my child, what is it? What has happened?" cried Mrs. Dorriforth.

"Oh, I'm a fool, aunt. Never mind, I can generally bear it. I didn't mean you to know," she sobbed. "Oh, it is such unbearable pain, and being weak just now, I couldn't keep it in."

"My child, I *must* know. Are you suffering?"

"Oh, it's not of any importance, nothing to hurt baby. He has a way of pinching my wrist—when he's angry; an Early Christian

couldn't bear the pain. What did you make me tell you for?"

"Was he angry? What for?"

"Oh, I shouldn't have said it—about Joyce Pringle. But the worm will turn sometimes. I'm not a stock or a stone," and the poor child lay holding her half-broken wrist, the beads of agony standing on her beating brow.

Mrs. Dorriforth said no more. She kissed Aglae, comforting her with eau-de-cologne and salts. But her aged bosom was shaking with indignation. To hurt a woman at such a time, when a man's whole being should be strung to lighten and repay her sacrifice, seemed to her hardly human. But questions must be reserved for some better time. For the present to soothe and calm Aglae, and for the future to be careful how her husband approached her, this was all Mrs. Dorriforth could do.

There was some mystery she had yet to solve.

CHAPTER XI

A STORM BREWING

"As the husband is the wife is: thou art mated with a clown,
And the coarseness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down."

TENNYSON.

MRS. DORRIFORTH found no opportunity of instituting inquiries as to the position of affairs during the next two days. Of Quekett she saw very little, scarcely indeed anything at all. He spent most of his time in the grounds watching the sowing, or surveying the action of his new ploughing machine. When he came to see Aglae, about once in the day, and was not irritated by her flying sarcasms, he paced up and down the room with the old impenetrable face, and the manner semi-genial, semi-phlegmatic, which had caught Aglae's fancy when she first knew him, probably through its entire unlikeness to Mildmay's.

However, she began to see very clearly the character of the man, evident in his pursuits and in the opinion of his *employés*. Quekett was a man who never felt fatigue, never rested, nor let his servants and those about him rest. One of those eager, restless, vigorous temperaments demanding perpetual exercise in every function—loving, in fact, to feel himself live—he loved money and money-getting because it secured to him the means of gratifying his pleasures; hence he enjoyed a return to something of his keen business habits which so well repaid him in Australia, and sold his hay, and his foals, and his fruit, and his cheeses, when it "paid" to do so. Fond of work, inquisitive, obstinate in love and hate, secret, implacable, he was free-handed with those who did his bidding and never crossed his path, and hence pretty popular; but he never forgave an omission, nor excused illness, and he hesitated at nothing where his will was involved. By nature a keen, stirring, coarse-fibred man of business, he was always on his legs; he was scarcely known to sit down, and his rapid searching eye made ample amends

for the slow external animation of his sturdy, bull-like frame and heavy paces. These were the charms which had won "Psyche's" heart, but Mrs. Dorriforth felt it evident that they had not retained it.

Quekett was nearly indifferent to the child, though it was the first, and really his counterpart to an absurd degree. He treated his wife like an upper servant, with civil distance, gave her no confidences, desired no co-operation, and slighted her openly. He had thus gradually Bohemianized his circle, which Aglae had not strength to purify, and "those Queketts" began to be a joke.

As for Aglae, she made no secret of the alteration in herself and in her social place, and cared for little beyond talking with her aunt about times and matters far removed from Barnet. She encouraged no inquiries about herself; she had contracted a disappointed, hardened look, and a disappointed tone of mind, visible when she was serious, which distressed Mrs. Dorriforth almost beyond endurance. "This is the result," she complained to herself, as she sat look-

ing over the broad grounds of The Laurels, "of putting Aglae out in the sun and the frost. I always told John my system was the right one for her. The hardening system has hardened her, and how is she the better for that, poor darling!" mourned the tender Dorcas, quite missing the point of her John's doctrine, which had always been to train the frail bough to *bear* adversity. He had never said that a black frost would agree with an exotic that had been nursed in a hot-house.

Aglae had at least freedom of action in her own house. Quekett, selfish as he was, dealt her that rough measure of justice. He liked to go his way, and let her go hers, and asked no questions. A more worldly wife would have rested content. "I don't limit you in food, clothing, or friends," he had once said to her in his coarse, common-sense way. "I don't mean to be limited either." But a heart torn from its resting-place like a branch from the parent tree, what use to sprinkle it with water? The branch will die, and the heart, crying out for sympathy and warmth, will turn aching to another spring.

At one person, however, Quekett's philosophy would have drawn the line. Mrs. Dorriforth had asked Aglae if she had ever heard of Sylvain since her marriage, and Aglae had started and blushed. "No, neither of nor from him. Henry would never allow that. It is not jealousy, but some antipathy, as from the lower to the higher, that makes him hate him. It is quite natural."

On the third day a faint chance was afforded this helpless, loving soul of discovering something anent the mysterious Miss Pringle. Aglae, worn out with talking, and the effort to lift and nurse the enormous baby (how Mrs. Dorriforth strove to like that baby !), asked for some book she wanted, and her aunt, only too glad to do something for her, descended herself to the lower floor in search of it.

As Mrs. Dorriforth crossed the hall and opened the door of the drawing-room where Aglae's book was, she saw a lady's figure reflected in one of the mirrors that lined the door panels. Mrs. Dorriforth, who had not expected to find the room tenanted, turned to the servant near. "A visitor? why did you

not announce to me that somebody had called?"

"It's only Miss Pringle, ma'am," said the girl; and the "only" struck Mrs. Dorriforth as an unpleasant choice between too much *empressement* and too little respect. Who *was* this chronic Miss Pringle? She would take the bull by the horns.

Giving the book to the servant, Mrs. Dorriforth went forward to speak to the visitor. "Miss Pringle? I am sorry the servant should have been so blundering. Your name was not announced." She saw before her a tall, unusually tall, young woman of about thirty, with cropped hair (she had doffed her hat, with an appearance of complete ease), and no particular features, shape, or manners; light-grey eyes, a receding chin, and even, white teeth. Miss Pringle stood up. "I came to ask after Mrs. Quekett," she said with an appearance of blunt candour, but which did not take in Mrs. Dorriforth, "and to see her if possible. I hope she's getting on all right."

"My niece is progressing," answered Mrs. Dorriforth, determined not to be daunted by

this enormous length of frame. "Indeed she has all along done remarkably well, only she tries sometimes to exert herself too much. She is not down yet, but she means to try to-morrow."

"Has she seen any visitors yet?"

"Not yet. But I dare say she will be glad to see the faces of her *friends* again when she comes down-stairs."

Miss Pringle made no move to go, broad as the hint was that she would not see Aglae. Perhaps the emphasis on one word was too slight for an ear of such an altitude. "I am very glad she is meaning to come down-stairs," said she, "it must be very dull staying in one's room so long."

"It is irksome, no doubt," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "But when people are weakly, the effort to move is greater than the dulness."

Miss Pringle had a very quiet, deliberate, phlegmatic manner. Mrs. Dorriforth, comparing her with the delicate nipped flower above-stairs, quite failed to see the attractions of this rival charmer. But to less partial eyes Joyce's self-possession and almost ill-bred phlegm of

manner invested her with a semblance of sincerity and good faith which even Mrs. Dorriforth, who knew that she was double-faced, was not insensible to. Don't we usually assume the man is a "good, honest, simple fellow" who drops his h's, and speaks bluntly with unwashen hands,—and doesn't the simple fellow know it, and practise on us?

"Mrs. Quekett has been very ill, has not she?" resumed Miss Joyce, after a pause, during which she sustained unflinchingly the good lady's critical spectacles.

"Well, these little affairs are never without their cost," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "I do not know that my nicce has been more ill than most people at such times."

Miss Joyce here lost countenance a little, for the first time. She suspected that Mrs. Dorriforth did not know all, and regretted her words. "Oh, perhaps I am wrong. I thought it was premature. Some one said so—my mistake, no doubt. In any case it is a great sacrifice to make, isn't it? For my part, I am against matrimony. I don't think men are worth what they cost us;" and she ended with

a little confidential laugh. Her remark did not, as she meant it to, commend itself to Mrs. Dorriforth, who was old-fashioned in her views, as we have said before, and considered that on marriage unmarried women ought to have no opinions and make no remarks. Miss Pringle, getting no encouragement on this line, yet bent on remaining, proceeded stolidly, after a pause, upon a different one.

"It has been such a pleasant walk here. The trees and the ground smell so nice after the rain. The snowdrops are beginning to come out too."

"Have you far to come?" asked Mrs. Dorriforth, utilizing her attempt to "make conversation."

"Yes, a good way," said Joyce incautiously. "A couple of miles. But I like the walk."

"You must be much attached to my niece, to take so long a walk, so often, merely to ask after her," said Mrs. Dorriforth with a hypocritical smile. Unluckily, Joyce was preserved from discomfiture by Mr. Quekett's entrance. Upon this, opportunity was gone for the time; but Mrs. Dorriforth inly resolved to outstay

Mr. Quekett, and watch their manner to each other. She was the more alert since Joyce had already roused a new suspicion in her uneasy mind.

The greetings were very composed.

"You have come to see my wife?" said Mr. Quekett. "She is not visible yet."

"So I hear. I am sorry."

"You've had rather a muddy walk, I should say."

Miss Pringle stretched out a large muddy boot, and said, "Yes." Then came the usual unmannerly pause.

"Nevertheless," thought good Mrs. Dorriforth, "here I will hold my ground like a very limpet." Mr. Quekett, as though he had read her mind, was one too many for her.

"I came to find you, Mrs. Dorriforth. I have just been to see Aglae. She wants you to go to her directly." Mrs. Dorriforth was startled; it shot through her mind that she had abandoned Aglae to the foe, and some cruelty might have been already the result. Her resolve forgotten, she sped from the room at once; and just had time in opening and clos-

ing the door to catch the words, "Well, why don't you go, you witch, after what you have heard?" and the exchange of a knowing little smile reflected in the mirror panels of the door. Mrs. Dorriforth saw herself defeated.

How long this courageous young woman remained after this Mrs. Dorriforth never knew. She was too hurt, indignant, and suspicious to go down and brave her adversary again. On entering Aglae's room she found her dozing, with the mighty babe, crushing and extinguishing her fragile shape, in her arms. Her husband had not been near her, nor had any mishap occurred. It was a stratagem of the simplest and most barefaced description, and one which haunted the poor lady like a nightmare because it seemed so unnecessary, though she said nothing to Aglae.

Mrs. Dorriforth failed to follow up through Aglae the very slight clue afforded by Miss Pringle to something else that had been concealed from her. Aglae had in a weak moment admitted her husband's habit of petty cruelties, but she admitted nothing further. Mrs.

Dorriforth could see she was not very happy. Aglae never denied that. But there was some loyal instinct still in her to conceal the greater part of Quekett's delinquencies. Mrs. Dorriforth tried the nurse. But she got very little out of her. The nurse had been changed, owing to something unforeseen, during the first days. Then she tried the housemaid, and at last with a golden key she tried Aglae's maid Simpson. "Did you hear anything about its being premature?" she asked her, and the woman said it had been so by a week or two, but not more. "And what could have caused that? anything beside a constitutional accident?"

"Well, ma'am," said Simpson at last, "you seem to be fond of missis, and she ain't many to be, and I don't know that anything need be 'id from you. But this is a house where questions ain't asked, you see. Master's free with his money, and it's no business of the servants' hall. Still, the first nurse *did* say it was an odd thing"—she lowered her voice —"missis and master don't at all times agree, in a quiet way, and the nurse did say as how

she saw big blue marks over here" (touching her shoulders and arms) "which *she* couldn't account for in a lady, not at such a time. But *we* heard nor saw nothing beforehand, and that's the honest truth. Not but missis has been much iller than *you've* heard, ma'am, or are like to."

Rightly or wrongly, Mrs. Dorriforth saw in this but the colophon to her quivering and terrified suspicion. Henry *did* beat his wife, but the wife was too proud to admit it. And this course of treatment (knowing Aglae as she did) would account for much of the change in view, manner, and look, which she found more apparent in Aglae as she saw more of her.

Vainly did she sound Aglae on the subject. It only made her fretful, and she would say, "Oh, *must* you keep talking about Henry? I have enough of him all the year round!"

One of the first visitors admitted to Aglae's boudoir when she was able to receive them, was a gentleman whose voice seemed familiar to Mrs. Dorriforth. He was a handsome, kindly-natured, easy-going man, with money, and birth, and no opinions. This was Captain

Carrington. Aglae welcomed him very joyfully, and thenceforward scarcely a day passed without a visit from him. He hung about Aglae at all hours, and frowned at her aunt.

At last Mrs. Dorriforth was clear when she had heard the voice before. It was in the train. It was the voice that had said Aglae was "delightfully cheeky," who had called Joyce Pringle "a wily old bird," who had spoken of Quekett as a "bad lot," and said "it was a shame, if one wasn't bullied."

CHAPTER XII

THE THUNDERBOLT

"The visitation of the winds
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deafening clamours in the slippery clouds."

SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. DORRIFORTH was very dissatisfied. She seemed incessantly tracing the new topography of Aglae's character, as we compare an old map with a new, finger on one, and eye on the other. Every *hiatus*, every *additum* was a blow to her; nay, it was a very battery of small blows. The coarsened views of life, the bolder eye, even at table (Mrs. Dorriforth strove not to realize) a certain recklessness, unconsciously mirroring Henry, who was a giant in all his appetites without suffering; the indefinable signs in tongue and gesture of some descent in feminine feeling and in habit; and, what

was more terrible still to the old-fashioned precision of Mrs. Dorriforth, the possibility, if not the existence, of a dangerous bond outside the honourable fence of home. That which Aglae, like many girls before marriage had never thought of or only known as a misty tragedy in bygone costumes, the continuing power in woman wedded to attract and subjugate, to wake and fritter passion, she had come to smile at as a common mutual relief; and that which had at first refreshed her as a luxury, had grown a necessity of her life.

As the small slug at the plant's root wastes but not kills the flower and leaf, so the grim discontent sucked vigour out of Aglae's life, and left its verdure spoilt and stunted, foreign to itself, like a strange form which is not new but only half developed, irregular, and askew. Every individual fibre of Aglae's nature had its own exhausting and persistent leech, only to be discovered by a general uprooting, and to such experiments the whole constitution of marriage is opposed. How could an outsider like Mrs. Dorriforth refresh this deformity, and

nurse it back to moral health? How could she cut away the false conditions before threatened mischief turned to calamity, disgrace, or death itself?

Was Mr. Quekett's familiarity with Joyce Pringle cause or effect of Aglae's frivolous intimacy with Captain Carrington? Mrs. Dorriforth, utterly at sea, ventured to allude to something of the sort at last.

But Aglae laughed. "Whatever my husband's failings may be, he is certainly not a jealous man."

"But aren't you trying, dearest child, to make him so? It is a dangerous game."

"No, sweet auntie," cried Aglae at last. "He is far too clever. I will tell you what, auntie; there was a time—a long time ago now—when I did use Carrington a little bit as an instrument, but it never had the least effect. I knew Carrington had a fancy for me, and I did encourage it."

"Dear child, I saw it. You are encouraging him as no wife should, however neglected. Men don't understand. He is a great deal too familiar."

"Familiar!" the girl broke out in sudden passion. "What would you have? I don't encourage him now. He understands. We came to a clear understanding, for it had to be. He knows that, however unhappy I may be, I am not going to be a fool."

"Aglae, Aglae, you frighten me. What have you let him say? You a married woman, and to be on such terms of confidence with another man!"

"Terms! another man! you don't know what you say, aunt." At length the storm broke out with a torrent of tears. "If I had a happy married life, if I had a decently considerate husband—but all the servants see who is mistress over the house. When I first saw Carrington, I cared nothing for him. I loved that man to distraction, like a mad thing. When I saw Joyce was drawing him away, I encouraged Carrington—just a little, to pique him. I saw he didn't care for that, very soon. He had Carrington always here, whether I liked it or no, but I never was unjust to him, or to Henry, or to myself, never. But things couldn't stand still; Carrington said some-

thing one day, and I answered. Gradually he dropped into a confidential kind of adviser, which is a great, great comfort to me, I assure you. I can say things to him to let off the steam. He is really fond of me, or he would not have come to be my true friend."

"Child, child, that will lead on to wrong," said Mrs. Dorriforth, weeping too, as she caressed and pitied her. "It can't go on always so; do be prudent, dear, be forbearing, and be patient. Perhaps things will come right."

"Patient! when I am a by-word in the place? Forbearing! when forbearance or not forbearance is equally undignified? Have I not been? am I not? don't I bear it now like a saint, keep it from everybody; and is Charlie to be cut off from me—the only friend, the only green place in the wilderness? Besides, there is no harm in him. I can manage him with a word, he is so shy; and then—he is a gentleman."

"He looks very silly—very empty."

"He isn't so very. Not so empty as my life here with no interests—no backbone; not

so silly as I should be if I let myself brood and cry all day for Henry's amusement. No, I won't please the reptilian Joyce by looking miserable."

"But does she know it makes you so? If some one were to——"

"If some one were to destroy her and everybody like her, it would be a good deed. She knows, but she cares for no one's feelings. The New Woman is like that—*her* kind, there are two kinds of the creature. She says, she does not like young men, she likes married men. Yet she scoffs at matrimony! That just means, another woman's pain is her pleasure. And Henry encourages her, and turns every one round his finger."

No one was better able to judge of that than his wife, and the truth silenced Mrs. Dorriforth, who wept on in hopeless puzzledom.

"And then you say things may come right. No, aunt, things won't come right, they never can now," sighed poor Aglae. "I have waited and tried many ways, gentle and rough. My last hope was baby. We had never had a child, and I thought when one came there

would be an alteration. No one knows how I thought and hoped and prayed about that child: no one knows how I looked forward to these days, and how it supported me in many a weary hour to believe that peace would come back to me again. But it has not. He cares nothing for it, my seclusion has been a better cloak and excuse for Joyce's visits, and nobody but poor Charlie Carrington cares for my dignity or my happiness. 'Things' will *never* 'come right'—never can I wish them to now. But I tell you, aunt, I feel for wicked women! I who am not wicked, who have never forgotten my duty. But I do understand how a husband can *make* a woman ruin herself by simply sitting still and staring at her. It isn't you who should reproach me, aunt, for bearing my worries as I do—for that is the sole reproach any one can make me. Oh, why, why did you make me say all this? I never meant you to know," ended poor Aglae in a tempest of tears that left her weak and shaken.

CHAPTER XIII

"AND THE FIRE RAN ALONG THE GROUND"

MRS. DORRIFORTH thought it advisable, in Aglae's interests, to call on Mrs. Pringle, and to extract from her some little light on the obscure condition of the relations existing between Mr. and Mrs. Quekett and Joyce. She hated Mrs. Pringle, because she belonged to the disturbing element in Aglae's home, but with a heroism befitting a stronger and acuter sentinel, the good soul tramped through the suburban mud to Mrs. Pringle's one morning, when she knew Joyce was coming to "sketch" in Aglae's garden.

Mrs. Pringle, whose face is distinctly portrayed by a dried apple with spectacles on, met Mrs. Dorriforth with phlegmatic cordiality not unlike her daughter's, in a drawing-room almost exclusively furnished by the knitting-

needles—with raw colours and suffocatingly thick wool—and a vast bureau covered with dust and Joyce's papers. All "literary habits" do not represent culture, nor was Mrs. Pringle a woman likely to nourish a genius. Everything in the room glorified Aglae, and set the loving champion against Mr. Quekett's course of conduct. Who, capable of enjoying Aglae's delicate beauty, could find real satisfaction in these "inferior gentry"? Who that was used to Aglae's flower-sweet rooms could sit at ease, even to smoke, in this odour of Berlin-wool shop?

Mrs. Pringle folded up a vast shawl she was knitting. "You have had a long walk," she said, as she pulled forth a chair; but she looked as gratified as an apple can.

"How is Mrs. Quekett?" was a question soon asked.

"Tolerably," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "I hear your daughter is expected this morning, but she will not be able to see my niece. Do you think she expects to?" she added, with a crafty motive to give this question an innocent or reproachful turn as occasion offered.

"I am sure I don't know," said Mrs. Pringle, taking up her knitting. "I never know any of Joyce's engagements."

"She seems very fond of my niece—or my niece of her," went on the Machiavel. Mrs. Pringle sniffed, and the regular Pringle pause ensued.

Mrs. Dorriforth would not break it, hoping for a favourable step in the confab; but then, seeing Mrs. Pringle foraging for photographs, she thought a plunge from herself would be better than a change of subject.

"Miss Pringle is a great sketcher?"

"She has learnt water-colour painting," said Mrs. Pringle. "She is so very clever, Joyce is. Mrs. Quekett don't sketch, I hear."

"Do you know which part of the garden she is going to sketch?"

"Oh, no. How should I?" said Mrs. Pringle, lifting up the dried apple. Her bluntness was like Joyce.

"Oh: I asked so that I might perhaps assist her when I go back—a little table—or water . . ." stammered Mrs. Dorriforth.

"Ah, many thanks," said Mrs. Pringle in

a less acidulated tone. "Joyce *can* draw. She will be delighted, I dare say. But she is a very independent girl: she always was." Then came silence, broken only by the click of needles.

"That is so nice in girls—good sense and *savoir faire*—so much better than helplessness. Not *too* much independence; but girls ought to learn to take care of themselves. I always brought up my darling Aglae to that liberty which is the prerogative of those who are fenced about by a guileless nature."

Mrs. Pringle did not reply. After a pause she said in a changed tone, "I shall not pretend to misunderstand you. You disapprove of Joyce's visits: well, all I can say is, not more than I do. You need not beat about the bush. You came to say it, and you have said it. But Joyce is odd—happily it is *only* oddness; she is a good girl at heart, at least I think so. That is, I hope so. But I can't say anything, for fear of making her discontented at home, and then she would simply go off into a flat of her own, and goodness knows what her extraordinary modern notions

would lead her to do. One hears such things about girls now-a-days;" and here, to Mrs. Dorriforth's amazement, by no means aware of reaching such a point so early in the interview, the poor lady began to cry. Mrs. Dorriforth could only apologize, she hardly knew what for.

"The child hasn't had the advantage of a father and brothers," moaned the helpless mother, wiping the dried apple carefully as though water had dropped on it by accident. "Not that they are always advantages. And her head is so turned by literary ideas that she will never take anybody's advice at all. And if she did, it would not make much difference now—she's turned thirty. Though really, at thirty years old," proceeded Mrs. Pringle's monotonous wail, "one ought to begin to be guided by others, whether they speak plainly or not at all—and it is not so easy speaking to Joyce; and, of course, if nobody tells her what they think of her, she can't alter her private convictions—though it is no use *my* saying any more to her. It is a great pity she quarrelled with Mrs. Wiley,

for she did behave like other people there. Sometimes I think she doesn't believe in a God at all, but is becoming an actual Deist! It all comes of this over-education; girls did not have ideas of their own in *my* time!" And here several yards of crumpled wool had to be pulled out.

This outburst was sufficiently like Mrs. Dorriforth in certain moods for her to understand its drift thoroughly: though the inconsequence of the deductions would have puzzled any one else. Why "literary ideas" should predispose people to resist *all* advice; why a brother's or father's existence could have been any advantage to such a person; why at thirty one is to adopt guidance which during all the preceding years one has done without, or how that guidance or advice is to be adopted if it is not conveyed to the delinquent; and finally, how private convictions depend upon people's not speaking plainly, or necessarily regulate small matters of outward conformity, which is what Mrs. Pringle meant, and what constituted a Deist in her unkempt mind, none of us will ever

know. But Mrs. Dorriforth found herself defending her recognized foe Joyce, and giving a good colour to many little ways and practices she herself considered highly objectionable—so kindly was her heart, and so touched by the old lady's palpable dejection—and she stopped short determinedly in the midst of declaring,

"How pleasant it was for a husband at such times to maintain some sisterly friendship with a woman beyond the age to nurse silly fancies, and how a middle-aged married man could not but be—— I can't think why I am saying this when I don't think it at all: quite the reverse," broke off Mrs. Dorriforth *sotto voce*, in a regular pet with herself, as with some outside personality which was making an unfair use of her organs.

"Mr. Quekett turns everybody round his finger," said Mrs. Pringle, like Aglae. "He asked Joyce to come as often as she liked, and it has quite destroyed her friendship with Mrs. Quekett. What if they *don't* get on? Joyce need not try to set things right. It is misunderstood, and people chatter so in places

like this. I hope Mrs. Quekett is not really jealous of Joyce."

"Jealous!" cried Mrs. Dorriforth, irate, especially at the idea of Joyce's mediations, and shaking out her feathers like an angry little bird. "Certainly not. How could it be possible? A married lady! nonsense, do not use such words, Mrs. Pringle."

"Oh dear, I don't know," said Mrs. Pringle, soaking her wool-work with tears, so that Mrs. Dorriforth choked too. "Of course Mrs. Quekett can be very disagreeable—and has been so to my poor girl, no doubt, and whatever she fancies she is quite wrong: and I dare say does the same herself: and if she did not, it would be all one. You mustn't mind my saying this, as we have spoken in confidence, and I can't be expected to turn against my own girl. And she is very much changed, Joyce is; she was greatly admired when she lived with Mrs. Wiley, her cousin, as companion, and she has always been a very fine girl: fine large eyes, and teeth, and figure, and hair"—and hands and feet, Mrs. Dorriforth was on the point of

conceding—" and Mrs. Wiley was very jealous of her looks, and so Joyce came home to me because it was disagreeable. But she is quite a different girl, so careless of appearances, so self-opinionated, and so mum-chance at home, and cares for what nobody says but Mr. Quekett: it is 'Mr. Quekett, Mr. Quekett,' all day. She used to go to church twice a Sunday, and write *résumés* of the sermons; now she only laughs at religion, because Mr. Quekett does. She used to knit all her own stockings, and now she does nothing but bicycle all over the place or walk about in the mud. I wish to goodness he could be induced to influence her a little." Having hitherto gathered that he already influenced her too much, Mrs. Dorriforth could not say anything to that. "She seems ready to stand on her head, like Herodias's daughter, if Mr. Quekett calls; and of course there must be something very great about a man whom everybody obeys, horses and all; but he *does* look like a murderer, he is so short and sturdy. I hope he won't murder my girl, walking home with her so late at night, and so often."

Mrs. Dorriforth felt it was time for the interview to end. She could not enter with dignity into criticism of her nephew, nor was she likely to gather further confirmation of all Aglae had said. So she took leave, assuring Mrs. Pringle that Mr. Quekett would not be likely to murder the young lady, or at any rate not *often*, and that less frequent visits would easily reanimate Aglae's waning friendship. "Girls are often pettish when they are ill, even married girls!" she added, meaning something kind, *n'importe quoi*.

Then she walked home, half comforted by her own hypocritical arguments, and remembering the hurt wrist, and the blue marks that Simpson had whispered of, the crushed mouse, and the small sudden smile which was like the charm of the snake when it summons the bird to its jaws.

She encountered Joyce striding homewards as on stilts, beaming, gay, glowing with exercise and her visit to The Laurels. She put on a calmer air and expressed sorrow at not having seen Aglae. "I should have stayed longer, in hopes to see her later, but the garden

was too wet to sketch in, so I shall go to-morrow," said Joyce, in her stolid, semi-sincere, candid way.

"She is just one of the doomed birds," thought Mrs. Dorriforth, with a touch of compassion which Joyce did not deserve; and she sat down on a stile to watch the "bird" (ostrich surely) covering the ground with steps that seemed themselves "strong-minded," armed with such vast boots, and brandishing her umbrella among the herds of cows she delighted to stride through.

CHAPTER XIV.

DRIVEN BEFORE THE WIND

"And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire."—1 Kings xix. 12.

MRS. DORRIFORTH was ere long recalled by the necessity of tending her invalid husband and bringing him home, half paralyzed now, to Bangor. It was with grief that she quitted Aglae, for very deeply she felt the value that her consolation and guidance might be.

Mr. Quekett fortunately expressed no impatience at the old lady's lengthened stay. He was a "good host"; there was a sort of freehandedness in Henry's hospitality when his will was not crossed that pleased many beside Aglae, and a convincing firmness about him, agreeably contagious, which made his friends stand by him with the same confidence as beside Mont Blanc, and deem him "as safe as a house" merely because he was rocky.

She therefore parted from him with a certain cordiality, and her earnest recommendation of Aglae to his forbearance and gentlest kindness was received by him with equanimity. "Certainly she is not as strong as she was," he assented, with simplicity; "but I trust she will soon be her old self. I shall give her change of air in a few months."

Nothing beyond this could be touched on between them, though the change of air might be another name for riddance.

A good deal of security departed from Aglae with her kind old aunt; she felt her going almost as a mariner in some sinking vessel would feel the withdrawal of the last strong plank. But she made a sincere effort to keep her spirits up, and not to become a moping and depressing object in the eyes of her husband and of the neighbourhood.

The obnoxious Miss Pringle was not in Barnet just now. She was supposed to be abroad, but Aglae naturally made no inquiries after her. Mr. Quekett was a good deal in London, and the herculean infant alone varied the monotony of its mother's life by

its screams and other noises, for Aglae did not receive visits when her husband was from home, and even Captain Carrington was banished.

When the child was about six months old, however, things fell into their old train. Joyce resumed her chronic position in the Queketts' house by no encouragement of Aglae; Carrington resumed his, which was no doubt as useful to Mr. Quekett as it was a relief to his wife. Three would have been an impossible company; but four got along pretty well.

It was not happiness, though. The most intimate friend in the world is not welcome between man and wife; matrimony being a bond depending on the nicest balance to be profitable, as much as the kitchen scales. What is nicknamed jealousy by outsiders is often only the uneasy wincing to restore the balance, like a man bearing a burden which does not chafe till it slips awry. Just to this extent Aglae had winced and fretted for a long time under an unrecognized pressure, coming from a quarter where she had once

fancied she found pleasant and loyal friendship. Her uneasiness had flattered the vanity of Joyce, and the tyrannous humour of Henry, till she had grown sore with fruitless attempts to accommodate herself to the situation; but it had never occurred to her to be *jealous* until Carrington had put it into her head with his commonplaces of condolence. Then the burning had begun in her heart, and she saw by the light of her own sense of affront, that there might be something substantial within the pestilent cloud about her, which her own struggles could not resolve, but which the smallest change in the conditions might congeal into very definite misery.

The quartet were together one summer's evening, and as usual, while Mr. Quekett entertained the lady he preferred, Aglae and Carrington loitered out of hearing. What would have revolted Aglae Dorriforth scarcely shocked Aglae Quekett, when Carrington whispered confidentially, "How go things of late, think you?"

Aglae answered, with a half sigh of indif-

ference, "Oh, not so badly. It was only dull. But dulness is a relief sometimes."

"Miss Pringle has been 'abroad' a long time, eh?"

"All the winter. Didn't you miss us awfully?"

"I counted the days precious accurately. I don't see why an old friend such as I should be excluded when Quekett is playing about at Hurlingham."

"Better so, my friend. You have always been good to me; and you see as clearly as I do what is best for me, Charlie."

"I do, by George," muttered Carrington. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. *I* haven't changed, you know."

Aglae looked up. She had long ago assigned Carrington a distant place, and did not permit him to draw any nearer; but she hadn't the heart to rebuff him instantly. She made no answer, but looked at the light in the drawing-room windows with a regretful sense of her position, like an appeal for pity to the pitiless. Her *belles années* were over and gone. She was a lonely and unloved woman; and she felt

it in every breath of the mournful air, every sound of bird and insect in nest or hollow. Now and then the piano broke the silence; now and then a shadow crossed the window.

"They must have missed each other, that romantic couple," resumed Carrington.

Aglae's lip curled. She hated speaking of them.

"I suppose you believe it *was* a 'miss,'" said Carrington with a laugh. He was feeling his way with considerable craft.

"What do you mean?" cried Aglae, with a great start.

"What do I mean? Don't bite a fellow's head off," answered the gallant Captain, lighting a cigar. "You will let me smoke?"

"Do you mean," panted Aglae, "that she has not been out of England? They have met in London?"

"By Jove, I do mean it, and I mean you to know it," said Carrington, laying his hand on Aglae's with a familiarity that Aglae was too excited to be conscious of. "Mrs. Pringle thought her daughter was visiting; in reality she had a flat alone near Victoria Street.

Victoria Street is agreeably near the 'busses; near the Underground; near Victoria and all the convenient places. I tell you they have been more together than ever they have dared to be in Barnet. It is half to spite Mrs. Wiley. I've seen them times and again, in very wonderful localities."

"I don't believe it; I don't believe it," gasped Aglae, believing it however with all her soul and strength, for many a recollection rushed to her brain with a terrible force of conviction.

"You needn't disbelieve," said Carrington. "Go and take a peep into that room now this minute."

The chance shot went home.

"I will," said poor Aglae. Her first impulse had been resentment at his tone. Then her temper began to rise, and she said suddenly, "I will—I will know whether this is true. Give me ten minutes. I will go round by the outer way—no, not with you, let me go alone."

"Very well, very well, as you like—but don't go and make a row. It won't do any

good," he said eagerly, detaining her. "This is what you banished me for, many a day, when we might have been together."

The light flow of her dress showed the poor girl threading the dark mazes of the closely-planted garden with feverish rapidity, and Carrington, with a kind of inward chuckle with which men often greet the sufferings of the women they love—for cases sometimes bear to men a ridiculous side, which to women are purely horror on all sides—sat down on one of the wicker seats, and noted how silent was the step of anguish. "Only I do hope there won't be a row. Rows do no good," he meditated, with philosophical expectancy.

Ten minutes passed, and Aglae did not come back. He went to seek her. It was not to sit solus on a wicker bench that he had come up to Quekett's. He could not distinguish the flicker of her dress in any direction, and he walked on lightly as a cat till he came to the conservatory beside the house.

He opened the door, and went on through the glass passage to what he felt was Aglae's shadow beyond; a curl of half-amused pity on

his lips and a nervous sensation about his knees.

He expected to find her weak, tremulous with indignation, excited, perhaps crying; he turned the corner, and there indeed was Aglae standing, calm, cold, mute. "Aglae!" he whispered, catching her hands to his lips—this time she did not resist;—"you are alone here?"

"Yes," she said, no tears in her voice at the melancholy veracity of his words.

"Has he——?" then he stopped; he did not know what to ask.

"He has set me free," she answered, with a certain dignity.

"This is *too* strong," said Carrington, feeling less secure of his ground, but resolved to make an effort. Receiving no response, he ventured to pass his arm about her and draw her to him; ventured to kiss her cheek; and she nestled her cheek against the face that had caressed her with the dull impulse that would have turned her to a dog's muzzle, if the dog had licked her then. Carrington thought it was love.

"You will listen to me to-night," he murmured nervously, flushing with joy, his very moustache trembling.

Presently Aglae roused herself. "Charlie," she said under her breath, "you asked me to go away with you once, and I was angry. I will go now, if you are in the same mind."

"Same mind, you angel?"

"Have you really counted the costs—the risks—what people will say. . . . You don't care for the world?"

Carrington's head swam with glee. "The world be d——d! If you love me I'll do anything, everything—and yet—'tis *you* will suffer. Have you thought what you're in for? I won't take advantage of you," he added, with a twinge of admiration at that modicum of unselfishness.

"I have thought," she said steadily, "I have counted the cost for both. For you, *éclat* and gossip for a time, a little coldness from a few matrons and a few steady men, a good deal of money thrown away on me, and then you will make your position again. For me, life-long disgrace, ill repute, heartless

jesting at my expense, and then, *peace and quiet.* But what does it matter? What have I to lose? My good name?—*Henry's* name. Friends?—I haven't one. Relations?—I haven't one but auntie, who knows all. Children?—I cannot help the child; it is barely mine. To stay would not make it mine. To bear all for its sake—the shame would be greater than the shame I go to. It is a choice between degrees. Yes, I have thought. Charlie, I am so grateful to you. I will do as you wish. I will go now or when you like. Take me away; I am quite prepared."

Carrington was silent a minute. He was a weak man; he had been bred in a school of morality which set pleasure above prudence, and a distorted gallantry above the most elementary notions of duty and self-restraint. He had had no intention of taking such a step as now he thought unavoidable; but his vanity blinded him to the insincerity of such love as he felt for this unhappy woman. He lighted another cigar; puffed away for a second or two; this was very sudden. Then, tapping

off the light ash, he whispered, without bending towards her, "Go down to the shrubbery. I will come to you there. There are lots of trains up, if you can cross the field to the station. It shall be Caen if you like, *pro tem.*"

Aglae moved calmly away, and Carrington called her back to whisper, "Stick on a veil." The thing was not so novel in his experience that it needed much arrangement; but he had no experience of Aglae's *savoir faire.*

Aglae went speedily to her own room, and stopped for a moment at the nursery door. The nurse had a visitor; Aglae did not venture in. So much the better; the child would sicken her by its likeness to its father.

She passed her maid's room; saw a common cloth jacket hanging behind the door: she hung her own silken cloak in its place, and pinned to it a leaf from her purse—"For Simpson, in exchange." There was no harm in a slight disguise for the benefit of the station-master; though no concealment was possible for more than a few hours. She was singularly calm, singularly resolute. There

is nothing so resolute and immovable as a gentle and yielding nature, once roused to a great plunge, and acting under violent excitement; and Aglae was so calm that she had leisure to be almost shocked at the facilities which seemed to pave the way to destruction.

Then, veiled and hatted, she went through the shrubbery where Carrington's cigar showed him to be standing: the burning tip was like a signal of freedom to her aching heart. Half-an-hour landed them in London, the first station on the way to that bourne from which no woman-traveller returns; half-an-hour more saw them speeding sea-wards, before Quekett had missed her, or had seen Joyce through the dark lane home.

CHAPTER XV

AT THE WIND'S WILL

"The purest treasure mortal times afford
Is spotless reputation: that away,
Men are but gilded loam, or painted clay."

SHAKESPEARE.

To those who know Caen, in fine weather at least, I need not expatiate on the sense of rest and comfort which the runaways experienced on reaching it. Placed in the middle of a fertile plain, its clean, wide streets and numerous fine examples of ancient Norman architecture seem to smile a prosperous welcome to the traveller.

The beautiful Abbaye aux Dames which Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, gave to the city in her desire to appease the Pope after her marriage within the prohibited degrees, the severer yet not less beautiful Abbaye aux Hommes, William's own offering,

stand in about the centre of Caen, monuments to ancient piety, if not to ancient passion. As she passed by, Aglae half felt them to be a holocaust for her similar offence. The masculine strength and grandeur of St. Etienne were not unsympathetic in her then mood; the ornate grace of La Ste. Trinité seemed to her appealing with womanly force of persuasion for excuse and mercy. All the world over there had been misery and doubt and disappointed love. But in the English Church there was no Pope to propitiate and coax to mercy—no infallible Father to absolve sin; the world's judgment might be infallible, but it would certainly not be merciful; no holocaust could be offered it, no prayer could soften it, and the step could never be recalled.

Ah! it is a strange state of things, this measure of justice to the sexes; Justice not only with eyes wide open, but having a bee in her bonnet. Still, the law of God would seem to be after all higher than the law of man; and may it not come to pass occasionally, that, after every effort of forbearance and affection has failed, the higher law contradicts

the lower? Then the contumely of man must be accepted; for if any righteous instinct is left to us, it is the instinct that when love is outraged and dead, to live in bondage with one we hate is blasphemy before God.

Aglae had borne and waited, she had done her best, up to her lights; but when she saw the woman who for an idle pastime had broken her happiness, and come between those whose hands were locked—when she saw the unprincipled girl who was always prating "against matrimony," in her husband's arms, Aglae felt that the time was past for pardon or delay. Every right and decent impulse in her said "Quit him," for she was still too young to be philosophic, as some women learn to be.

Had Aglae been a perfect, or even a wise and temperate character, she would have gone back to her aunt, and bided the consequence. That would have been the immediate demand of Quekett that his wife would return to him; and his shrewdness, and the extraordinary magnetic power he possessed over many persons, especially women, would have defeated

the efforts which poor Mrs. Dorriforth and Aglae might have made to obtain a separation.

Not being a perfect character, and knowing her husband's moods and her aunt's helplessness, Aglae rejected the sole course which would (would it?) have saved her reputation, and let the desire of vengeance take the bit in its teeth. It was a sweet drop in her excoriating draught to feel that she could wound and madden Henry as he had maddened her, by quitting him in Carrington's company. No husband would endure to be fettered to such a wife; he would divorce her for his own sake; but he would never forget the insult. It gave her a fierce pleasure to be able to retaliate at last, and, by punishing him in the sorest point, to completely free herself. Aglae had, it is too clear, deteriorated since her marriage. She had lost generosity and self-respect with hope and happiness, and now snatched at the melancholy refuge of impotence, cutting off her nose to spite her face.

Poor outraged, tempted girl! With no friends save helpless old people, with no guide

save a lover having neither strength nor principle, what was there to hinder you, to preserve you from yourself? Not love for Carrington, but the utter destitution of helpful sympathy, was the spur of her miserable action; leave her to the Omniscient.

After the long journey, at Caen they folded wing. They had travelled without any break. Carrington, who did not speak French well, was glad to subside into Humby's; and there the ill-matched pair sate them down and stared out at the pretty reach of water, with its green banks lined with scanty trees, where starts the canal from Caen to the sea. What were their thoughts? The mind of Carrington was excited with foolish triumph; Aglae's depressed so utterly that she had no room left for bitterness. Now she realized the Nemesis of her act, the terrible necessity of staying with Carrington, who, though she had a friendly affection for him, bored her hugely after some hours, and, being greatly in love, pestered her for caresses which she was equally loth to give or take, and could never see how she longed to be alone. She had hitherto

kept him at arm's length, but that could not last for ever.

The terror of meeting persons known to her began to oppress Aglae in her present nervous state. In an English inn any one might burst upon her with questions and (still worse) looks very difficult to meet. "We cannot stay here, Charlie," she said. "Whatever we do, wherever we go, here it is impossible to remain. We must go to a French inn, or into lodgings."

"The deuce!—when I can't speak this cursed lingo!"

"That can't be helped. I will do the talking for you."

"Why didn't you say so before the luggage was brought up?"

"Charlie! don't worry."

At last Charlie saw the necessity of obedience, and went out on a foraging expedition, which left the pitiless Aglae a few hours to herself. Most thankful she was to see him stride up the Boulevard St. Pierre with his face from her. A little rest, and then she too ought to sally forth and collect the necessary

contents of the trunk which they had bought on the way. She locked the door, and lay down on the bed. Perhaps she slept; for in youth, nature comes with relief to both sheep and goats. Perhaps she forgot the present for a time, for the colour came back to her cheek. She was roused by a fancied knock at her door. The horrid present was all recalled as she reflected that Carrington could claim entrance. The sun, almost at setting, was gleaming on the window, and instantly a crowd of horrible terrors rushed into her mind. It was one thing to punish Henry; it was quite another to have to endure this other man's society. Nightfall, and the position she had accepted, suddenly sickened her with unutterable dread. No, it was not Carrington—not yet. There had been no knock. Ah, God, there was still a little respite. In a panic of terror she caught up her hat and gloves, hurried down-stairs, and entered the street, now filling with passengers of the shopkeeping class, who, work-hours ended, had strolled out for a breath of fresh air.

A fiacre was passing, and Aglae summoned

it. She sank back and covered her face with her veil, dreading to meet the face of Carrington. Quickly she finished the errands which she had in mind; and utterly regardless of the feelings of the unlucky Charlie, nightfall saw Aglae descend from her fiacre with just so much *bagage* as would give her a respectable air, and take up her abode in a distant lodgment—alone.

Poor stray sheep! She had thought in those moments of indignant shame, when she had decided what course to take, that she quite understood what her desperate action involved; but in fact she had absolutely realized nothing till now. Unhappiness is as a fire which intoxicates, like those burning drugs which cause madness, and capsize the point of perspective, as used by certain Eastern peoples. It may excite, infuriate, dehumanize—yes, unhappiness is a moral astigmatism. The world's view is the poet's view, and it holds earth's "purest treasure," "a spotless reputation." Alas! many a spotless reputation cloaks a very sullied life; and it is possible for a reputation of the worst to cover and

clog for ever, through a moment's incaution, the cleanest soul. In spite of Shakespeare, and the time-honoured social custom of always thinking the worst of a woman, moral worth and "reputation" are things not to be confounded. But a sore pang, not so unlike shame, began to gnaw at Aglae's conscience. In hurting her husband she had hurt herself worse, and, though she had saved her self-respect, no one could enjoy that but herself—no one would ever believe the truth.

The disgust and perplexity of Captain Carrington may be better imagined than described. To be placed in a position so utterly undignified would have infuriated any man. Carrington was a good-natured fellow, rather shy and rather weak, and even at Humby's he felt more utterly wretched than angry. He could not account for his companion's disappearance. He chafed under the garrulity of the kindly host. He sat down, slapped his leg with an oath; then got up and lit a cigar; paced the room, looked out of window, turned over various incompetent plans in his mind, sat waiting for Aglae until

three in the morning, dupe that he was, and finally went to bed.

His discomfiture culminated next morning when the post brought him a letter in Aglae's hand. He felt that he must be the laughing-stock of the whole inn-staff, and his brain reeled in his violent efforts to concoct some probable-sounding story to account for such very odd proceedings in this respectable inn. But Aglae's touching letter did not assist him :—

"DEAREST CHARLIE,—Forgive me. I have played you false. I am very miserable, and I have no excuse to offer for what I have done. Oh, Charlie, you have been good to me ; be so now, and do not try to seek me out. I could not stay with you : it came upon me like a blow ; I could not, I could not. Never mind where I am, or shall be, by the time you get this. I shall do very well, I have enough money, and no fear. Forgive me—though I don't know why I keep asking you to forgive me. I forgive you too. Oh, I am miserable—miserable, dear Charlie."

It had of course no date or address.

After three days' search Carrington's conscience was satisfied of the utter unlikelihood of tracing a woman determinedly concealed; and he reluctantly came to the conclusion that he would be better at home.

"She has formed her own plan, no doubt," said Carrington, disheartened. "When she wants me she will make a sign; but she can't suppose me to be going on as a permanent boarder at Humby's. She will write to me in England—and to England I will go, and do what I can for her interest there. It may be better to go about as if nothing had happened, and swear that I know nothing of where she went or when. I may get tidings of her by the time I find out Quekett's intentions. I'll try and shield her, poor soul!—but it's all a deuced blunder together, I think."

CHAPTER XVI

BROKEN BY THE WIND

"There is no woman living that draws breath
So sad as I, though all things sadden her.
There is not one upon life's weariest way
Who is weary as I am, weary of all but death."

THE hapless Aglae had quitted Caen for Mézidon, Mézidon for various other small towns, and at length found herself at Vitré, that picturesque city that scarcely ever finds favour in the sight of the traveller for pleasure. Pursued by a haunting dread of being followed, for a day or two the complete isolation she had sought was very restful to her. She had had her revenge, she had lost her good name in Carrington's company, whilst she had in reality saved her honour by quitting him on the very first opportunity. But a good deal of the £20 she had brought with her was

already spent, and returning reason began to warn her that she must communicate with somebody.

She dared not write to her own bank; her own little property was not her own in law, it was Quekett's; and besides, she was so anxious to keep her hiding-place a secret from Quekett, whose anger might take any form of persecution; her mind, feverish with excitement, exaggerated the cruelties within his power. She began to feel very lonely, for safety without sympathy is not altogether a boon. She would write to her aunt, and tell her all.

There was only one inn at Vitré which bore a good reputation, according to the guide-books: it was not a very striking one, and yet when Aglae reached it she was seized with a panic, and refused to go in. She thought she heard English voices, and asked the tout who brought her to it to show her another. This was a mistake which she had dearly to pay for. The inn which she was next escorted to was dirty and objectionable on the very face of it; but Aglae did not like to change her mind again, and took a room. It was situated in

a narrow old street, with overhanging houses whose beetling upper stories were sustained upon huge boulders of stone rudely piled in lieu of pillars or posts of wood.

Aglae had never travelled alone in her life until now, and in spite of a feeble little narrative which she had prepared to account for herself, she had an air too naïve, and a face too English and far too pretty, to give her strange position any reasonable probability. She called herself an artist, travelling through a few cities on her way to her home in Avranches: but beautiful, delicate women of sweet-and-twenty do not travel unprotected in England, much less in France, and the people of the house instantly decided that she was an *Anglaise* of bad character, running from her debtors, and requiring very vigilant *espionage* that they might not lose by her.

So they proceeded to *espionner* this poor little waif by surreptitiously abstracting some of her money during the night; and Aglae, who suspected fraud, but was powerless to defend herself, or to proceed in any way against the people at present, found herself, with only

a sovereign or two, at their mercy. She wrote to Mrs. Dorriforth for assistance; but it was not difficult to guess that her letter was to ask for money, and the answer which came in due time was appropriated by mine host. Saddened and astonished at receiving no reply, Aglae wrote again, urgently entreating her aunt to send her a cheque and to come to her if she could, but to conceal her whereabouts from the bugbear which haunted her—her husband. Then she risked writing to the bank, for need was pressing, and to neither of these urgent appeals did she receive any reply.

Then dawned upon her the real horror of her position. She saw herself in the absolute power of these people; she suspected, but could prove nothing, and knew herself to be in hourly danger of insult or even violence. She could not pay the bill that now lengthened itself before her frightened eyes, like the worm that dieth not. She could not quit Vitré; she was penniless, and her plunderers never let her out of their reach.

How she cried that night, and wished herself dead and drowned in the Vilaine, which

had looked so pretty in her eyes at first, wandering through the meadow below the great Norman walls of Vitré outside the town. The clear pale sunset colours made the snowy clothes spread to dry beside it an ornament to the scene, and the lines of poplars that broke the level of dazzling grass and more dazzling water stood like sentinels of peace.

Every evening that miracle of beauty arrayed itself; every evening forgot the suffering that possessed her. She bethought her of disposing of the small water-colours by which she had at first endeavoured to give colour to her assumed name of artist, but she found it quite impossible to gain even a few sous in Vitré for these poor little wishy-washy daubs, although she found little difficulty in disposing of her clothing through the innkeeper; and the small sum which he brought her for these things rapidly returned to his capacious pocket, in payment for the cup of coffee morning and evening to which Aglae's meals had dwindled. She cried because she was so utterly helpless; she cried when she thought of her happy, honourable girlhood, her past pure aspira-

tions, her tender home in Wales, her noble, upright, goodly Sylvain, whom she had thrown away for a worthless tyrant, and whom she had lost sight of for ever. She cried because she had prayed to God for help and succour, and He had taken no heed of her; she cried when she wondered what she was to do if no aid came, no letter, no friend, and whether she would really have to fling herself under the wheels of the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest some dark evening, when the Paris-Rennes train came by.

There are not many readers of this story who have ever known what absolute want is, and how it weighs down and warps the mind.

The depression caused by want of food, the carking care of anxiety and oppression, soon wear out the most buoyant spirit, and make the body their machine and scapegoat. Superstition and religious terrors come in and help the deadly work, and after that sickness joins the group of devils, and the last devil of all is death.

Aglae had got as far as the religious terrors. She began to think she must have sinned

heavily to have merited such woes these many years. She had failed in some duty, God was angry with her, and if she died it would be to attain more horrible sufferings in an after state.

Should she go to a priest? for her own creed helped her nothing. But according to the views in which Aglae had been brought up, it seemed terribly wrong to have dealings with a "Papist."

Ah, well, her God had failed her—why should she not try the Virgin, whom the French believed in? Perhaps in France, where she was worshipped, she had more power. Aglae went out one afternoon, and bent her way to the Church of Notre Dame, to pray humbly and ask for a sign. God could not be angry with her for doing what He let the patriarchs do; and she was so faint for food, perhaps the air and the change would do her good.

If you had seen this inexperienced and blundering creature making her way on heavy, trembling feet over the rough stones that pave Vitré, and which are so charming when one's stomach is full, and mine host's eldest boy keeping her sedulously in sight in case of

accidents, you would have pitied her, whether she had any good name or not; and the fact is, though she had cast away that precious possession, and could hardly expect a censorious world ever to give her credit for virtue, she was actually as reproachless within and without as yourself. Her head felt a little giddy, and the heaviness of her eyes gave her a very touching and sweet expression. Her bronze hair was rolled up closely under her one hat, and her cold arms folded under her one cloak, and the sacrifice of many little garments that ought to have kept her warm made her press it very closely round her to avoid shivering visibly. The weather had turned rather chilly, for there had been a day or two of rain, and so she may be excused for feeling cold, not having tasted meat for the greater part of a week; for she told the inn-people she had lost her appetite, though they knew quite well she had lost her money, and how much.

There is nothing very attractive about Notre Dame of Vitré. It is built in a style which indicates the decline of Gothic art. Outside there is a stone pulpit and canopy of the

fifteenth century; inside it is dark, and not very clean. When Aglae entered, the church was full of people. An old priest was examining and preaching to the school-children, blessing and distributing little relics and rosaries, and a throng of peasantry, the women with print kerchiefs, the men with savage goat's-hair dresses peculiar to this part of Brittany, and not inodorous, stood respectfully within hearing. Now and again the children's voices broke into a hymn of an old romantic air, with a plaintive refrain of "Marie, Marie, Marie," which sounded sweet, and fitting in with Aglae's thoughts further depressed her.

As she stood listening to the exhortation, her hands resting in each other, a slight sudden sound startled her ear like the sudden bursting of a glove. She looked up, then at her own glove, and saw a mighty spider as big as an apple sitting in the palm of her hand. The creature had dropped from the ceiling, exactly into her palm, with a splash of dust that covered her whole glove. As she shook it off, and saw its sprawling legs bear it away, the effort to suppress a shriek was too much for

her, weak as she was, and she burst into tears. A kind woman gave Aglae her chair, and she heard them whisper, "Ah, the goodly words, they go to the heart, *bien vrai.*"

"No, no, it was the big spider," said Aglae, ashamed of her tears, and it amused the woman that so small a cause should have frightened her.

"*Ah, voilà qui est drôle, ça,*" said one of them. "To cry at good luck. The big spider brings good news, mademoiselle. You will have good luck soon."

Poor Aglae brightened up at this, with real faith in the superstition, thanked her, and tried to dry up her tears; and as the little congregation filed out of the church, Aglae fell on her knees at the Virgin's shrine, and prayed some prayer full of tears and spiders, but perhaps more fervent than any she had ever offered up, for a sign, for help, for grace.

When she had knelt a long time absorbed, and felt a little quieter, she rose, intending to go back. It was growing dusk. A gentleman rose from a neighbouring chair, and accosted her. He was no priest, and Aglae was un-

conscious how picturesque she had been looking, with the small red light of the Virgin's undying lamp illuming her shining hair, and the dim colours of the altar throwing out her delicate shape and profile. Possessed by her idea, Aglae did not quit him as she ought to have done; she sank upon a chair beside him to hear what he was saying.

"It is the sign," she said above her breath.

"Yes, it is the sign," said the stranger, adroitly taking his cue; "you asked Our Lady for a sign, and she sent me to you."

What else he said our poor Aglae only half realized, but she was conscious of having made an appointment with him at the great house outside the walls where he dwelt. The sign had not come in the form she expected, and she shrank from the promise she had made; but hunger is a hard taskmaster, and this poor child had lost resolution and command of herself of late.

"I will go," she repeated to herself, "I will go. It is God's will. Henry has brought me to this. Perhaps it is not so wrong as the river."

So she hurried back, to await the stranger who had answered her prayer; very lightly her steps skimmed the big stones now, for she understood the spider and the Virgin both. So quickly she went that she scarcely looked before her as she threaded the narrow shop-lined streets, and suddenly stumbled recklessly against a gentleman who had to support her with his arm from falling outright. She just looked up as she stammered her thanks, and saw—Mildmay's own face before her.

"Good God! Aglae!" he cried, startled out of himself.

The voice and her own name seemed to turn her head quite dizzy. Clinging to him, she cried out involuntarily, "Sylvain, I am so hungry. Let us go home." For a moment she thought she was in Wales.

"Aglae—out of England—hungry?" said Mildmay, stupefied. "Where is Quekett?"

"Quekett?" repeated she. "Oh, my husband! Oh, Sylvain, haven't you heard?" And then her voice failed, for talking choked her.

"Heard what? Is Quekett dead? Is your aunt here?" asked Mildmay.

"If I could have a little bit of food—ever such a tiny bit," said poor Aglae, pressing her hand on her aching chest without knowing what she was doing, "I think I could get on."

"You shall," said Mildmay, who now saw how white and ill she looked; and he put her arm in his with a tenderness that was almost a caress, though it was in the middle of the street, for he did not altogether know what he was doing either.

And he took her with him in a carriage to the 'Voyageurs,' where he was staying, and placed her at the *table d'hôte* which had already commenced, for there was no time to be lost.

Ah, that *was* a *table d'hôte!* Although the food was coarse, the cloth not very fine, the company very mixed and for the most part clad in blue blouses nor squeamish about expectoration, that was the richest meal that Aglae had ever enjoyed, the moment of supremest satisfaction that she had known for many a long year.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN THE WIND DROPPED

SYLVAIN'S perplexity at the position in which he found his poor little old friend was dispelled by the melancholy narrative which she gave him in the little sitting-room after dinner; but his distress at the change in her, inward as well as outward, increased every moment. He had left Aglae an innocent and singularly right-minded girl, impulsive, and as far as he was concerned almost painfully eager not to do wrong. In giving up Mildmay for Quekett, she was as fully persuaded of the criminality of wedding a man whom she loved less than another, as she was inclined to gratify her own mushroom passion. She was as anxious not to wrong him as to please herself. She had gone to Quekett's arms fully certain of having done what was right, although sensible

of the suffering she had imposed on Mildmay. She loved Quekett, and meant heartily to try and make him happy.

Now, she was another creature: she had stooped to vindictive anger, she had grown sarcastic and bitter, her mind confused offences of most unequal magnitudes, she had accepted addresses from her husband's trusted friend, had quitted her husband's protection with her lover. Mildmay, in deep dismay, thought that Carrington had seduced and deserted her in Vitré, and, miserably sensible that she was further off from him than ever, he offered to accompany her back to her aunt in Bangor. But Aglae resisted.

"Oh, Sylvain, I cannot go back. Better to die here. I should find Henry there: it is the first place he would go to. He would make me return to him."

"I would protect you somehow from that," said Mildmay, "if such a thing threatened. But I don't think it likely that he could wish it."

"Sylvain, I tell you that he will. He can enforce it."

"But you left him with another man. No husband——"

"But you don't think I *stayed* with Charlie?" cried Aglae, flushing scarlet. "I went away the moment we stopped; it was at Caen. I came here by myself, to escape him."

The facts dawned on Mildmay, and the severity which had mingled with his compassion faded. "Thank God for that!" he ejaculated; and he lifted her hand to his lips with some emotion; "I did you a grave injustice."

"You need not," said Aglae. "I was hard on Charlie, for he was fond of me, and he rescued me from the home which dishonoured me. But I am not dishonoured now, save in the world's eyes, and I accepted that condition. Henry must have *some* human feeling to wound," she added with a strange sarcastic laugh.

"Ah, child, how he has changed to you!" said Mildmay with a sigh. "But I cannot leave you here; you must go back to Mrs. Dorriforth."

"No, I will not," said Aglae, in a panic so real that Mildmay knew not what to say.

"It is past eight—nine," he said. "It is too late for anything but sleep now. Lie down and rest, and I will manage everything."

The poor little hunted head, once—nay, still—so dear to him, sank obediently to that long-lost rest, as Mildmay snatched his hat and hurried out on the errand before him.

He took a room for Aglae in the 'Voyageurs,' and bent his steps towards the den which Aglae had named to him, the den of thieves wherein she narrowly had escaped ills worse than death. There he recovered the one or two relics which cupidity had left its helpless victim, and, after an altercation of two hours, in which it was discerned that English is fully a match for Gallic acumen, his threat of legal proceedings extorted a portion of the money robbed from Aglae; and he left the whole rascally crew cowed and frightened by the results of their art.

When the morning came, Aglae, rising from a clean bed, and brought to a wholesome breakfast, found that Mildmay had made

preparations to take her away from Vitré to Paris by an early train ; and on leaving Paris, at her earnest entreaty, he promised to shelter her in London, with friends of his own, rather than run the risk of placing her with her aunt and uncle.

CHAPTER XVIII

SHELTER

"The wolves have prey'd: and look, the gentle day
Before the wheels of Phœbus, round about
Dapples the drowsy east with spots of grey."

SHAKESPEARE.

To Sylvain Mildmay, exiled for seven years from the country which bounded with her white cliffs all his dearest associations, it is not surprising that his sudden meeting with the woman he had loved aroused all his enthusiasm and affection for her, which indeed had never wholly died out. Every hour seemed to bring back more vividly to his mind the happy months that had promised him happy years, in Bangor, by the Menai Straits, before trouble had come to either.

He thought her more beautiful than ever: for suffering, which had stolen her rich colouring, had left the perfect forms—the fine brow,

the nose slightly aquiline, the eyes and eyelids beautifully formed, and set beneath bronze eyebrows of wonderful length, like a Greek mask. Her complexion, like too strong a light upon her, had at one time actually dazzled the sight, and to some extent obliterated beauty of line now made clear, when the light was partly gone.

In Aglae, it is not strange that her heart, which long had dwelt regretfully on the fate she had rejected, turned back to Sylvain with a new and loftier devotion founded on knowledge and nursed by pain, so that her past love for Henry Quekett seemed to her an infatuation little less than madness.

Sylvain's brotherly tenderness and courtesy during the long journeys before them, his care of her health, injured by her late privations, awoke in her the consciousness that he cared greatly for her still. But she knew not that Mildmay's resolution, gradually strengthening as they travelled on together, was that, despite the stain which would always lie on her name now, and all his grief and disappointment in her, he would make her his wife,

when Quekett should push the evidence for a divorce and get one.

And no small thing it was, for many would blame him, few would accept his version of the circumstances under which she had quitted her home, especially after a successful divorce case; few would forgive her for breaking away from her child, and forming at once new ties. But Aglae's shrinking from her husband extended itself to the child. She felt so strongly its likeness to him, and dreaded so much lest it should grow up to make her miserable, that the love she had at first felt for it shrank up like a dry flower; and though she often missed it, and thought of it when other baby cries fell on her ear, she did not wish to have it back. It seemed to her the child of Quekett; not hers at all. Her chief joy in it had been before its birth: afterwards it had been an instrument of pain to her. In her present morbid state she longed to wipe out of her mind every memory, every scene of her life with the man who had deceived her; she longed that she might never see anything to remind her of him again.

The friends to whom Sylvain could alone venture to introduce Aglae in London whilst concealment seemed desirable were a clergyman and his wife, living at the East-End, for whom Sylvain, long known to them, entertained a sincere respect. Mr. Bertrand was a hard-working parish minister. His wife, although she laboured daily in a field of her own, took very little part in his work, and did not enter into parish matters at all.

Sylvain left his charge at the Charing Cross Hotel, and went to call on the Bertrands alone; having already warned them of his visit and need of help. He found Mr. Bertrand in his study, with books and papers neatly piled around him. It was a moderately cheerful room, whose windows, wire-blinded, looked on a not very delectable public-house, and let in the echoes of the not very delectable language peculiar to the English slum. The clergyman was unaffectedly glad to see him.

"Why, it must be seven years since you went out? Bless my soul, how time flies! But you did not give us much hope that you would ever return at all then."

"I was possessed by a private trial of my own," said Sylvain, who thought it best to be completely open. "I should not have been sorry to be sure I had not many years before me anywhere, for life looked blank then. The prospect is better now, but not bright."

"Young heads! young heads! always flying to death as the solution of troubles, small and great," said Mr. Bertrand, shaking his head, "instead of preparing for its being the reverse. Death may be no end, but a beginning. However, tell me, what is the matter? You have some advice or help to ask—some 'old man of the sea' to get rid of? I didn't clearly understand your letter; but you will find me very glad and ready to help you if the way be possible."

"Thanks much," said Sylvain. "I thought you would be a friend to me. I had better begin at the very beginning of a long tale."

"You haven't told me why you have come home. Not health wrong, I hope?"

"I was rather shaky. I had a touch of fever; and after a few years one gets beastly lonely."

"Horrid climate, isn't it?"

"In summer, Calcutta isn't bad. But the monotony of life there, and the fatigue, sometimes gets oppressive: my work is fatiguing, though I like it; I am on my feet all day."

"You left the service, didn't you?"

"I did. And that is about the starting-point of my long story. I threw over the service because, as you may or may not know, I was engaged to a young lady——"

"Who threw you over, my dear boy?"

"We separated by mutual consent. I saw that she had formed a new attachment, and it was better, of course, for both."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bertrand. This kind of confession was not new to him.

"She married the man she loved best, and I went back to India. I accepted there a post at the Calcutta Museum which suited me; I took the shells and botanical department. At last I began to get used up, and my people suggested that I should apply for sick leave, and come back for a summer, which I did in March. I returned to England for a few weeks, and then that wearied me: I felt un-

settled, and ran over to Normandy, for a little tour with a man I knew. I little thought," continued Mildmay, "that I was running straight at my fate. At Vitré I came accidentally in contact with the lady whom I had long ago hoped to marry; and that under circumstances so singular and so painful that I was much exercised how to meet them. You see, her marriage had been miserably unhappy. Her husband had estranged her by cruelties and by unfaithfulness. Her lot at home, as the by-word of the place, was insupportable, and at last drove her to a very unfortunate step."

Mildmay spoke with emotion, for he felt how difficult it would be to secure sympathy on Aglae's side: so strong is English middle-class prejudice against squabbles between husband and wife.

"I want to place her with some one who will feel for her, and who can protect her better than her aunt. An action for divorce is inevitable now, and that is to be wished and courted. And when that horrible ordeal has been passed," said Mildmay, "I wish you

to know in confidence that I intend to make her my wife."

"Make her your wife? a divorced woman! This is surely a very unhappy business. You must be off your head, my boy. The Church won't sanction it. I am one of those who consider re-marriage of divorced persons unallowable. Have you considered all the drawbacks?"

"Indeed I have," answered Mildmay, his blue eyes flashing. "I have examined the matter on all sides. But I love Mrs. Quekett, and I am ready to marry her, and obliterate as I best can the stigma which many people will cast upon her. I ask you, under these conditions, to be kind enough to suggest to me some refuge, with a lady, somewhat in her own rank of life, where I can place Mrs. Quekett until we know more clearly what is her husband's course of action."

After some further conversation, Mildmay left his kind adviser, who promised to write him in the course of a few hours what immediate course he recommended, and returned to Aglae.

What a pleasure it was to him to see her eyes brighten at his coming! changed and pale, nothing could mar her delicate features; and as Sylvain approached her, and, taking her hands in his, looked into the soft eyes which had once mirrored no other man's face so fondly, and looked at the curved sweet lips which once had been his own, his heart beat in the hope that the past might come back again. Not a line marred the smoothness of her brow; the long eyebrows drew their splendid arch almost to the first golden down that softened the line of bronze hair. He looked at her so long and so earnestly that the blood came to her cheek, and now there was nothing visible that marked the flight of seven unhappy years.

"Aglae," said Mildmay, "I have found you a home. I have told Mr. Bertrand all your troubles. And now I want to tell you something else that I told to him. May I?"

"May you, Sylvain?" echoed Aglae, in rather a choked voice, dreading some fresh suffering to be forced on her.

"I told him that you are very dear to me, Aglae. That all those weary years in

India I thought of you, and loved you, without hope. Now a glimmer of hope has come back. Will you be my wife, Aglae, when you are free?" and he took her, trembling and weeping, in his arms.

"Ah, Sylvain," said Aglae, almost with a shriek, "I don't deserve to. While you were thinking of me, always good and noble, I was growing wicked and evil. I am worse than I was. I am not fit to be the wife of a man such as you are, now."

"But I love you, Aglae."

"And is it not enough that I treated you ill when I did not know your value: that I spoiled your career, and broke my word to you? No, I will not give you such a wife as I: a wife who is under a cloud, half guilty, wholly unworthy. But my eyes were holden, I did not know 'the highest' when I saw it. I pay the fit penalty."

"But I love you, Aglae."

"No, no, it is your eyes that are holden now. I will not marry you."

"But I love you, Aglae," reiterated Mildmay with a glad laugh.

CHAPTER XIX

NO HELP

"The time of lovers is brief,
From the fair first joy to the grief
That tells when love is grown old;
From the warm wild kiss to the cold,
From the red to the white-rose leaf
They have but a season——"

Some peaceful days in the quiet Rectory went far to restore Aglae's health of mind and body, and brought back much of the singularly sweet unconscious expression of face which had once reminded Mildmay so oddly of the Naples Psyche. She was beginning to feel comparatively a free woman, to discern a prospect of happiness and well-being, such as she had once beheld close, and shut her eyes to. Aglae found Mrs. Bertrand sympathetic—another word for inquisitive—and (not grasping her husband's religious

views) willing enough to keep her as a "paying guest." Many good people, who are bored by their friends' troubles when the troubles continue too long, lend a ready acquiescence when they are quite fresh. Such people love gossip, and hate singularity with a holy hatred. But the readiness feels like kindness. Privately, she regarded Aglae as virtually engaged to Major Mildmay.

Aglae found Mr. Bertrand a man of strong common-sense views and a very cheerful temper. He looked on her as an erring child, but not as one whose sin has no forgiveness in this world or the next. Privately, he felt sure that she would return to her husband.

How often, in listening to his courageous sermons, or to his kindly exhortations and questions at home, Aglae felt that a friend such as he, when she was friendless at The Laurels, would have saved her many a bitter hour, and taught her a more dignified and estimable course of conduct. It might have been possible to escape from her misery without ruining herself, without bringing a stain on

the fair name of the man whose dearest wish it was to make her happy.

She had as yet heard nothing momentous of Henry Quekett's movements. Once Mildmay wrote to her that he was away from Barnet. But there was little doubt that matters had a favourable aspect, and it was pretty obvious that he was not seeking her in any hostile spirit, since he had not been to Bangor, and had simply written to Mrs. Dorriforth to ask whether Aglae had gone to her house, which Mrs. Dorriforth, in utter grief, was able truthfully to deny with all knowledge of her whereabouts.

Mildmay spent a couple of days with Mrs. Dorriforth, whom he found much shaken by the news of Aglae's disappearance, but she was greatly consoled when she knew the actual position of affairs. Mr. Dorriforth was, happily for him, beyond the reach of ill news and mental trouble; he had grown nearly childish since his last attack, and cared for little else on earth beyond a tame owl, which was his constant companion. After Bangor, Mildmay went to Barnet, and succeeded in meeting with

Charlie Carrington, who proved more useful than any one could have expected, and was, like many in life, only too delighted to disburden himself of valuable news, chiefly bad.

Mildmay returned, after verifying it, to London, to see Aglae, whom he found very much improved, as we have seen, in both health and spirits.

It was so evident from the grave lines in Mildmay's face that he had brought her news of consequence, that Aglae, forgetful for the minute of everything but joy and gratitude, ran up to Mildmay, and clasped his neck with affectionate confidence, almost an embrace.

She had never in all her life done this before, and the shock of conflicting emotions unnerved Mildmay, full as was his head of serious matters.

"My dearest," he said, unlocking her hands, "are you prepared for very—strange—news?"

"Yes, yes," she cried, "I am prepared for everything. I was sure you had tidings for me this time."

"Tidings, yes, but not such as either you or I expected," said Mildmay. "However, I

don't think you need fear that Quekett is seeking for you at present."

"Thank God for that!" said Aglae, wistfully. "Perhaps he is not so wicked as I thought he might be."

"Wicked!" echoed Mildmay, with agitation; "he is a devil of hell."

"What is he doing?" gasped Aglae, terrified again.

"He has gone off with Joyce Pringle."

"Oh!" said Aglae, relieved. "I thought it was worse. Sylvain, I don't care: let him. I don't feel to mind a bit about it now," she added innocently, looking up into Mildmay's face.

"You don't! Oh, you don't understand. See you, he has run away with her, eloped: they all know it at Barnet now. Don't you know what that means?"

"It means he is trying to spite and hurt me."

"It means a great deal worse than that, it means that he has foreseen your plan, and frustrated it—that no divorce is possible now. I took a good legal opinion before coming here.

It is the law of England, that crime on one side may claim divorce; but crime on both sides frustrates it. Quekett could have followed his wishes in private in his own house or any other: but his policy has been your deliberate ruin. You have but two alternatives, to return to him if he compels you, or to avoid him by concealing yourself. You can choose between the life of a fugitive, and the life of a dog!"

The horror of his words stunned Aglae so completely for the time that Mildmay thought she was insensible: and indeed a great shock, like a physical blow, strikes its victim stupid for an instant, and then the rebound of agony follows like an echo. Aglae was sitting back in her chair, stiff and white, her eyes fixed on vacancy with a fearful stare, then she raised her hands to her temples, to still the spasm of returning sensibility.

"The pain in my head," she stammered; "I did not hear rightly."

I hope he may be forgiven if in that moment of agony Mildmay strove by caresses to soothe and comfort her. "Yes," he said presently,

"you heard rightly. We have got to face the inevitable. But some help, some light may come to us after a bit."

"It is impossible," said Aglae, "that that can be the law. What is bad in one must be doubly bad in two. If wrong in one renders people unfit to go on living together, wrong in both makes them more unfit."

"Morally, yes; legally, no. The marriage law condones a double wrong, as two negatives make an affirmative."

"Then the laws themselves must be wicked and imperfect!" cried she.

"Imperfect! You are not the first to complain of the English marriage laws, Aglae, or to suffer from them," said Mildmay with a bitter laugh. "But your sufferings will not reform them. Laws are made for the community, not individuals. They embody a certain rough outline of human justice which fits the majority of cases, but leaves untouched those most complex and most painful. What individuals must do is to look out for themselves. You acted, in leaving your husband, upon a hasty impulse, founded on the belief

that honour and decency in him would have released you from him.... Better had you not incensed him. But it is useless to think over that now. As the matter stands, his anger has vented itself in a cruel revenge. In any case he might have punished you by simply abstaining to claim his right of divorce; but he has selected a more stinging punishment, by depriving you of any hope of future release. He has made you irrevocably his wife."

"His wife!" The full horror of the thought appalled Aglae; and they sat silent, looking into each other's faces as into the face of sudden death. She made an effort to recover herself, and asked him what it involved. "Does it really involve all the obligations, Sylvain? Can he really make me go back?"

"He can make you go back to him: he can make you live with him. You are just in your old position, only far more helpless, and infinitely more hopeless of good treatment."

"What am I to do, Sylvain?" cried Aglae, clinging to him. "What can I do? Can nobody help me?" And the tears began to

flow down her white cheeks in her utter despair.

"I don't know what to advise—before God, I don't," said Sylvain; "for the sole alternative of concealing yourself from him, means a life of perpetual effort, anxiety, degradation, misery—even if you were to succeed. The law is powerless to protect you from your legal protector. It cannot separate man and wife."

"Sylvain," said Aglae—in her misery her mind turned to pity the misery of another—"he has ruined Joyce Pringle too. It is wholly unlike her cool, prudent character to be dragged into such a position. I never thought she cared enough for him to make any sacrifice. I thought she meant only to make me miserable. Perhaps she loved him truly too."

"Ah, that no one can tell. What means he has used to prevail on her to ruin herself, merely as one move in his game—for he has a game, a very base one—none will ever know probably. He has a strange power over people when he chooses to exert it. But I think pity

would be thrown away on a character like Joyce Pringle. A woman who will destroy a wife's happiness to gratify, not passion, but simply vanity, is scarcely worthy the name of woman. But her poor over-indulgent mother is to be pitied. She is quite broken down by her calamity and disgrace."

"Sylvain, who told you all about it?"

"Carrington. I sought him out, and he offers you all help."

"Ah, then it is all true. Charlie knew Henry so well—in Australia, in Italy, and here. Is Charlie very angry with me?"

"Carrington is a very good fellow, Aglae. He says you played him a trick, but he deserved it. He doesn't mean to bully you, or molest you; but he said if you bore no malice, he didn't, for Quekett is a devil on earth, and if you will receive him as a friend, and only a friend, he will do what he can to be a real one. I didn't answer for you."

"Charlie has a good heart, and has often been a comfort to me, but he mistook me, and I took a base advantage, I believe. I should like to shake hands with him, some

day. No one knows better what I have had to suffer, and he was always sorry for me."

"I went to see old Mrs. Pringle, myself, with him. Poor soul! she does not know where her daughter is. Joyce has treated her with inconceivable, unnecessary contempt. She gave me one or two missing links in the chain of Quekett's moves."

"Sylvain," said Aglae, catching at every straw, "you said Henry had some game he was playing. Don't keep anything from me. As you say, who knows whence a ray of light may spring?"

"Not from this, I suspect," said Mildmay; "but I will tell you all I know, if you don't want to be spared pain."

"Yes. Go on."

"Well, the whole story is a mixed one, wheels within wheels; but sometimes complicated machinery gets out of order. Do you remember when you met Quekett at Lucerne seven years ago, in 1881? Do you recollect the waiter, whom your aunt asked for his number, saying he had gone, and the lady too?"

"I do," said Aglae, after a minute's reflection. "It surprised Aunt Dorry, who thought he must be married."

"You remember seeing him at Geneva, in company with a lady?—whom we did not then connect with him in any particular way."

"Yes, I remember. A middle-aged lady she was, I think. Before he made himself known to us, I had thought she was his mother."

"Well, she was scarcely middle-aged, thirty-five, or forty—the most dangerous age. And do you remember hearing of a lady with whom Miss Pringle lived for some years—I think she was a connection—and whom she quitted about the time of your marriage?"

"Certainly; I have often heard my husband and Joyce speak about her, and joke about her. I have received her once or twice—Mrs. Wiley; she lived in Geneva."

"Well, here's the pith. Mrs. Wiley was the wife of a barrister who held some post in Geneva. When you met Quekett, he said he was just coming to England for the first time since he left it; he did not tell you that

he had been in Europe already three years. Well, he had been all the time living in Rome, and there it appears that Mrs. Wiley had great influence over him—in fact, it was a very real and serious business; as far as I can judge it seems to have been the grand passion of his life. Carrington tells me that he was faithful to this woman, as long as she cared twopence for him, and when the affair ended, as all affairs end with unprincipled women, he was fairly furious, and seems to have nursed every conceivable project of injuring her. 'So in a wink the false love turns to hate,' for *that* sort of thing is not real love. You mustn't mind being disgusted, Aglae, if you wish to know all."

"No, no," ejaculated Aglae.

"The rupture did not take place in Rome. Mrs. Wiley wished to come to England, and she came with her maid. When we met him in Switzerland, he was escorting Mrs. Wiley. The rupture took place after their arrival in England, when prudence or a new whim attacked Mrs. Wiley.

"Miss Pringle was not travelling with Mrs.

Wiley then. She joined her some little time afterwards, and the two were very close friends. Indeed, Miss Pringle owed a good deal to Mrs. Wiley, who, in Mrs. Pringle's inability, took her into society, and made much of her, and no doubt made use of her too. The first method Quekett employed to punish Mrs. Wiley, after the quarrel, was to transfer what he called his affections to this girl. Joyce was not generous enough to sacrifice anything to another woman, of course. She accepted Quekett's addresses, and naturally was *chassée* speedily, and went home.

"After this, Quekett saw and loved you for a time, but when the red flag of your beauty and innocence had been shaken before her for a while, he returned to a meaner instrument. It would sting any proud woman that the love she had once deigned to accept, perhaps to prize, could be won by anybody, good or bad. Fidelity to such as Joyce Pringle would be a worse sting."

"Ah, Sylvain, you are very bitter on that woman, but it hits me too."

"I can't help that, Aglae; you deserve it,"

said Sylvain, some human anger with her coming for a moment to the surface.

"That is true," said Aglae submissively, and his anger was gone.

"Forgive me; I spoke like a brute, like a most utter beast. You don't deserve it at *my* hands, at any rate, and I apologize. You know all the rest. You were sacrificed to his revenge, bruised for the transgressions of another. Now, he punishes you, and her, by a single master-stroke, with a refinement of cruelty which is a part of his character. But no mortal soul could have foreseen this final move, and I swear to you, Aglae, that I will spare nothing and omit nothing to deliver you from what threatens you now, though I fear (and you don't know what that fear is to me) that you are taken from me for ever. You have no 'case' as the law now stands."

"Ah!" cried Aglae—and now tears of agony forced themselves again from her eyes —"I don't deserve either the good or the harm I get. My state is worse than ever it was before, by reason of your affection for me. If he had simply not divorced me, and

not recalled me, I might have led a sinless hermit-life. But now—now, Sylvain—I *love you!*" she sobbed out in her misery.

Sylvain's face betrayed as much suffering as hers. Often afterwards Aglae remembered his tall, slight frame as he stood beside her, his face working with half-controlled emotions, and his lip quivering with something he was about to say—but he did not say it.

CHAPTER XX

FAIR-WEATHER FRIENDS

Poor Aglae was extraordinarily friendless. She had lost her girlish acquaintances in the garish circle of Quekett's *habitués*. She had made no real friends since her marriage. She had no one but Sylvain and Mr. Bertrand to advise her, and neither of them could do much for her, even in the way of good advice, just at this juncture, because the one was hampered by his secret hopes, and the other by the tenets of his order, and neither was truly impartial. Mrs. Bertrand had grown perceptibly cooler since she knew that Aglae could not marry again. Unlike Mr. Bertrand, she saw no objection to re-marriage; but she did object to "visit" a separated wife. *Coverture* would seem to represent the *alpha* and *omega* of Mrs. Bertrand's moralities! There are

many like her: and they are the worst obstacle to woman's honourable liberty and amended status.

At last an idea came to Aglae which she thought worth while mooting to Sylvain. She sent him a line. "I should like to see you again for a few minutes. Come in after supper if you can."

Whilst she was awaiting the answer she tried to settle to some useful occupation. She tried to sew, to read, to sketch a flower that was on the table; but there are moments of misery when the needle is powerless to soothe woman as the pipe may fail to soothe man.

Sylvain came in before supper, for every hour was of value. But he gave small encouragement to poor Aglae's rather wild suggestion.

"Sylvain, I have been thinking. So much has been made clear to me since I heard all you told me, especially about Mrs. Wiley," said the poor child, her eyes heavy and dark with thought and tears.

"Well, what has come clear to you?" said Mildmay. Aglae blushed. She hated to put

into words what wiped the bloom from even the first days of radiant married life—days, the memory of which she had clung to through all the after darkness. "Things I recollect give confirmation to what you said about Henry and Mrs. Wiley. I told you Mrs. Wiley had once or twice dined at The Laurels. I used to be surprised at Henry's way of vaunting me up to—*at*—Mrs. Wiley, but I thought, as she was an old friend, she understood his ways, and was very good-natured not to mind. Perhaps she did mind; it was done with a purpose."

"I wonder you didn't see through it," he said.

"I never did. I never suspected. But now I see why she came. Her visits to me prevented 'talk'—prevented people saying he had cut his old friends; they gave her past acquaintance with him a good colouring, and gave Henry the opportunity to sting her: I was the unconscious instrument. I hope she knew I was unconscious," said Aglae, with a sigh, "wicked as she is."

"Oh yes, she must have seen that. It is

a low business. Was it only to overhaul this ugliness that you wanted me to come?"

"No," said Aglae, stooping forward earnestly, "I have a plan. Go and see if Mrs. Wiley can help us in any way."

"Mrs. Wiley! what nonsense, child! Ah, pardon me; I didn't mean to be harsh. But how can she help us?"

"I don't know. I feel as if she might—if she would."

"Oh, this is wild. I couldn't go. I have no clue to her, no right, no excuse."

"Appeal to her generosity, Sylvain. She cannot think I was party to insults of his. She may have some heart."

"Pooh! you don't understand a woman of that calibre. If she had any feeling about it, it would be hatred of you."

"Appeal then to her revenge, Sylvain," cried Aglae earnestly.

"Her revenge?"

"Yes. Do you suppose a woman could forgive a man that treatment? Do you think it would not be pleasant to her to repay some of it? Why, I have a woman's heart, and

I know it," and her soft eyes had a hard look under the pressure of her thought, which shook Mildmay.

"Egad, it is an idea," he said, after a pause. "But how can I get at her? She is not to be trifled with. She wouldn't see me."

"Ask Charlie Carrington; he knows her enough."

"She must indeed have grudges," said Mildmay. "I will think it over—I will talk it over with Carrington." And he caught up his hat at once.

"And when you judge fit, I will go to auntie," said Aglae. "I cannot stay here for ever with strangers, however kind; there is nothing to wait for now," said Aglae, her lip quivering at the failure of her hoped-for emancipation.

And whilst she is on her mournful way to Bangor, let us see what Mildmay made of his interview with Mrs. Wiley.

Carrington approved the plan, and gave Mildmay some "tips" as to ways and means, founded on some personal knowledge of her. He had at one time been more of a favourite

with her than he chose to confide to Mildmay.

They went together to call upon this lady one morning, and although Carrington had written for permission to bring Mildmay, they did not easily procure admittance. Mrs. Wiley was too much engaged to see visitors. She was in the midst of preparations for a general removal. There was to be a sale in the house, and Mr. and Mrs. Wiley were to sail for Melbourne within a week or two.

"Hang it, we are only just in time!" says Carrington, whistling.

The visitors were persistent, and succeeded in getting the concession of a few minutes with Mrs. Wiley. They were ushered into a warm, snug, scented morning-room, where fragments of embroidery, a novel, and a bowl of choice orchids offered all the evidence of innocent tastes and occupations.

She came in, a short, firmly knit, handsome woman, decidedly *passée*, but bearing still about her hard searching eyes and well-controlled features the traces of magnetic attractive qualities. Carrington sprang the mine

upon her, but spring it as he might, those cheeks and that bearing had too long served her to fail her now. She was completely unmoved, save for just the right amount of polite regret at the falling away of any whilom mutual acquaintance, whose fate was completely indifferent to her.

"I have seen nothing of Mr. Quekett for some years," said Mrs. Wiley, lying back in her lounge almost at full length; "indeed, scarcely anything since his marriage. I called upon his nice little wife a few times, but they lived so far off, and I am never a fixture. Mr. Quekett was a great friend of my husband in former years. I do not see how I can be of any 'use,' as you put it, in these most unfortunate events which you say have befallen."

"I felt sure you would feel interest," began Carrington, blunderingly, "in such a wretched position as Mrs. Quekett is in. She is so nice, you know; she deserves a better fate."

Mrs. Wiley only answered with an inquiring look, which completely shut Carrington up. He saw she had heard of Aglae's escapade,

and felt that he was not quite the right person to back her up, especially *vis-à-vis* Mrs. Wiley.

But after an awkward pause Carrington took heart to raise his head and say frankly that he respected Mrs. Quekett, and owed her so much for having mistaken her character that he was not afraid to make an effort to help her now, even if it involved rebuffs from all quarters.

Mildmay's representations, though more skilful, were not more successful. He appealed to her kind feeling, but Mrs. Wiley was not to be "drawn." Snake-like she wriggled away from every home-thrust, and adroitly turned back upon himself her opponent's weapons. After a short interview she dismissed them in a manner that left them no alternative, and under a sense that their importunity would have been held a little impertinent by any one less lenient than herself.

"I am to hope, then, for no advice from you?" was Mildmay's last adventure.

"I am at a loss to conceive what advice you could have expected from me," answered

Mrs. Wiley. "I think you must really be under some false impression. Even if I knew either of the parties better than I do, you must see that interference on my part between man and wife would be very useless, not to say ridiculous, to them, and most unpleasant for myself and my husband. I am sorry my time is too occupied to be any longer at your service. With every wish for the satisfactory conclusion of such an unhappy affair —good-morning."

"Well, we didn't expect much, and we haven't taken it," said Carrington, as they walked down the street. "I knew from her mouth directly I saw her that she wouldn't budge, but she could have given us 'tips' enough if she'd liked."

"I didn't know how much I expected till now," said Mildmay, in a depressed tone. "But I was a fool; women don't help women."

"No; at the same time they punish men," said Carrington. "I don't know how we could have put it better, I'm sure. But I suppose she's got a prudent fit on, or some-

thing. I remember now I saw old Wiley's name in the *Times*. He has some appointment, Supreme Court Judge or something, and they are going out to Melbourne. Perhaps she means to be very careful, don't you know."

"Didn't Quekett come from Melbourne?"

"Yes: had a big place outside. But he didn't know the Wileys then."

So, unhelped on any hand, Aglae hid her diminished head in Bangor, where the Dorriforths had but just settled down again after their long and useless absence. But she found a very different home from that she had left. Her uncle was a broken, silent, almost childish old man, unable to follow his old hobbies or to evolve the bushels of good advice which of old had been so seldom followed by his wife, and Mrs. Dorriforth had but just recovered from a serious attack connected with the heart, which long fatigue in tending Mr. Dorriforth, and bringing him home, and the shock of Aglae's disappearance, had brought on.

But they welcomed her as to a haven where

peace, if not safety, might dwell. Mrs. Dorriforth on her sofa, and Mr. Dorriforth in his padded invalid chair, with his tame owl beside him, were both brightened up in some degree by her arrival, and she saw at a glance that in their eyes she was blameless, for they knew her nature too well.

CHAPTER XXI

MISCHIEF AHEAD

"But be not thou as these, whose mind
Is to the passing hour confined;
Let no ignoble fetters bind
Thy soul, as free as wind."

SIR LEWIS MORRIS.

IN her old home, then, dwelt Aglae Quekett once more, thankful and happy to be again with that one tender friend of her childhood, who had never said a cross word to her, or attributed to her a motive that was not high and lovable. Once more the old surroundings brought back the old interests, which she began to enter into as of old, but not with the old zest and spirit. Aglae had suffered and lost fire and intensity of enthusiasm for righteousness, to some extent, with her experience of cruelty and treachery. The knowledge of good and evil, not having been

brought before her in the right way, had done her harm, not good; had weakened, not braced her; but Mrs. Dorriforth, broken down and saddened as she was, nursed a stronger, an almost passionate faith in Aglae's recuperative power and upward tendency of spirit, in proportion to her own decay of energy and helpfulness: yet herein she may have been more helpful than any other, for Aglae's essential need was belief and trust in her, and liberty to breathe and expand.

Seeing her again about the house, older, graver, but still Aglae, Mrs. Dorriforth, from her sofa, recurred with the force of association to the Psyche ideal which Sylvain had projected, and her fancy gave her hope, and Aglae encouragement, perhaps based on an understanding keener than it seemed of the girl's yielding disposition. "The soul is a flame," she used to say to Mildmay, who was in and out from time to time, as the protector of both, rather than the suitor of Aglae; "not a fixed shape or substance. You may crush and confine it till the beauty is gone, and the heat turned to smoke and ashes and smoulder-

ing danger, good for none. But when an outlet comes, the tendency will be perpetually upward; you cannot change the nature of the spark. It will at once be a light in utter darkness, a comfort to those who are cold and grieve, a beacon to those who have forgotten or lost heart."

"We have pushed the fancy too far, haven't we?" Sylvain said.

"No, it cannot be pushed too far," said Mrs. Dorriforth. "When you first used the simile it took hold of me, as truth does take hold—it was self-evident; I knew Aglae—John used to say she was untried, and weak, and needed the rough and smooth of a wider experience to develop and strengthen her; I used to be vexed with him, poor John, but now I see that we both saw aright. Fire needs air and guidance, but not a violent wind and a prison; the clear flame may be developed and turned to great uses for the good of many, and that is better than a little flicker in a little lamp; but it ought not to be fanned, and then neglected, till it burns down the village. That is fire—that is the soul—that

is Aglae! The simile holds good all round, Sylvain; never lose faith in her, and she will never disappoint us."

Then Sylvain or Aglae would tend and calm her till the hectic flush or the violent tears that followed any excitement about Aglae had passed away, and Mrs. Dorriforth would look on with patient, pleased eyes, while her darling stitched for the poor, or added up accounts, or sang her little old Welsh ditties, or folded and dusted and labelled neglected valuables, with the faithful old Kate, just as seven years ago she had done when she was but a "little lamp," and had not rushed into mischief through mis-usage.

Nobody talked to Aglae or to each other of her past mistakes; no one remembered that she had made any. That was because she had acknowledged them, perhaps. But once, and once only, she was spurred to refer to the past, and that was by an unlucky lucid interval in the old man, whom some passing indisposition in the owl had aroused to quicker cerebration or what not. Anyhow, Mr. Dorriforth tried their spirits and their patience by repeated allusions

to the doings of twenty years since, and keen-edged memories of Aglae's childhood. "Married the wrong 'un—married the wrong 'un," he murmured. "Much less trouble to everybody to have married my old friend's boy—my old friend's boy. And what more we could have done for you I don't know. What more—what more we could have done for you—year in, year out, what more?"

When he had been put to bed, owl and all, and Mrs. Dorriforth returned to her sofa, with a look at Aglae in which the aching at her heart came out like a colour, Aglae opened her lips in words that were new and strange to the old lady, with her older traditions and associations.

"Oh, auntie, if it all came over again it would happen the same, I believe," she said. "It is not that you did not do everything that heart could think—dear uncle too—you have been angels of forethought, generosity and tenderness. Some girls complain of not having liberty, and they revolt like Joyce—some girls grumble because they can conceive of a few advantages that they have not had.

With me, only too much was done. If I had had a gloomy, or an unhappy, or even a dull and tight-laced childhood, consider what it would have been to meet Sylvain, a miracle of graceful learning, and eagerness to still further serve and cherish me! But think what my life was!—and it is the life of many girls, and perhaps one cause of so many aberrations. My girlhood had been all *eau sucrê*, and when that gave place to still richer honey, as it were, why! any new flavour, sour, acrid, or bitter, would have attracted me away from pure curiosity. Henry's brusqueness was just the antidote to the silken consideration which revolved too much around me, and me only. His self-centred despotism was unconsciously a relief from me, me, me, whom I was tired of. I believe there is a grand truth behind the theosophic theory of the ego, happy in Devachan, craving for reincarnation in order to suffer again. I was tired of never feeling the rein, I think. I liked the novelty of the bit. Can you understand this madness, auntie?"

"I ought, every one ought who can look out on human life and see how the balance is kept,"

said Mrs. Dorriforth with a gloomy remembrance of her John's foreboding. "I suppose we need our cycle of seasons like the plants, and even frost has its office."

"At first," went on Aglae, her mind dwelling intently on that far-away episode, "I didn't mind his indifference to books, to good works, and beautiful things. I never quarrelled with his ways. When he swore at his men, he paid them the more, and it seemed to me right, in him. When he snored through the grandest music, it did not vex me, in him. I even rather respected him when he first used to—strike me;" but the last words formed themselves in a whisper and a great flush, for they had never escaped her before.

Mrs. Dorriforth lifted her eyebrows mournfully; this was too like the Russian boor's wife to be flattering to her love of Aglae.

"I am certain," proceeded Aglae dreamily, her cheek on her aunt's knee, "I wanted some strong chastisement. Girls do. They don't develop without suffering. They must suffer, to live. That's what they want, though they don't know it. Perhaps even Joyce wanted it."

"The suffering came, then," Mrs. Dorriforth said sadly; "and the minister was indeed a flame of fire."

"Yes—I did not know how much too solemn the experiment was to try. The animal side I had been shielded from and trained away from, was to be my experiment—there was not much spiritual or mental sustenance with Henry. But when chastisement came—how bitter! how hopeless! *how long!* And then my training had been too tender, it had done nothing for my moral muscle. I was soft from head to heel—I was intolerant—I could bear nothing. Oh, how hard it was to bear!"

"But can you say your training is responsible for your suffering, Aglae?" said Mrs. Dorriforth, startled at a hint.

"Never, darling. Only my weakness, which could not support such loving care and guidance. You were too good to me. The life of a boy at a public school is what teaches strength, and judgment, and self-reliance. I never knew the value of suffering till I had been through it. If I had learnt what a boy

learns at school, I should have felt Henry's strange power, but I should never have married him. The evil glamour would have passed off if I had fought against it. *My* school came all after marriage. And again, I never knew the right value of love till I came back to you, auntie."

Afterwards Quekett's name was never mentioned in that quiet home; it was needless excitement for Mrs. Dorriforth, and brought the cruelest terrors to Aglae, and they all knew inly that when he made a move that would affect his wife's liberty or happiness, the news would reach them amply soon. Mildmay, however, who, in the absence of any need to live elsewhere, had settled himself in the little inn about three-quarters of a mile from the house, kept himself pretty well informed, through Carrington, of Quekett's doings. It appeared that he was still with Joyce Pringle, resolvedly extending the term of Mrs. Wiley's sharpest pang, whilst that estimable woman was pursuing an unquestioned career in Melbourne.

It happened one evening (mercifully when

Mildmay happened to be with Mrs. Dorriforth) that Mr. Quekett unexpectedly entered the room where they were innocently sitting. It was like an apparition from hell, for the horror his entrance struck into them; and old Kate, the tears of terror freezing on her cheeks, came in after him, and stood staring, without offering to move, in the blind instinct to assist where, poor woman, she was powerless to prevent.

The last time Quekett had been in that room was on Aglae's wedding-day, and he had sat rather silent, his thin lips set, but his eyes full of triumphant admiration of his bride, by the window, waiting for her leave-takings to finish. Now he came in with his face clouded and petrified by hatred and determination to punish. His intention sat in his steely eyes and on his square brow, so palpably and immovably that Aglae's flesh crept with dread, and Mildmay's passion of resentful opposition made his face reflect somewhat his enemy's expression. Thus suddenly, with a cruel want of delicacy and respect, Quekett had come to claim his wife.

But Mrs. Dorriforth, who at moments of dire emergency always gained a force and presence of mind for which she often paid by a reaction afterwards, sat up with calm sharp eyes, and greeted him with "It is you, Henry Quekett, and your coming is characteristic. Why have you come to-night?"

Quekett, who had not counted on the presence of a male champion, and had therefore arrived like a conquering hero, answered sternly enough, "I have come to demand the return of my wife to her own home. I have come to insist upon your detaining her no longer, in the face of law, decency, and her duty as a mother."

"My niece is by no means unwilling to resume the office of caring for her child," Mrs. Dorriforth answered for her, "provided you make it possible. But she refuses to place her person in the power of a husband who insulted her in her own house, and who will torture her with physical pain when sickness renders her helpless."

Mrs. Dorriforth's audacity and reference to his personal cruelty during Aglae's con-

valescence were two things which Quekett was unprepared for. But after a silence so audible that even the distant village sounds seemed painfully loud to their excited senses, he spoke again. "My carriage is hard by; I demand that Aglae return with me at once."

"Aglae will do no such thing," answered the authoritative voice of Mrs. Dorriforth.

"On my part as protector of these ladies," said Mildmay in a very quiet voice, "I demand that you leave the house. Your presence and manner may cause serious illness."

Quekett turned upon Mildmay with a look of deadly rage. "Who are you," he said, "who presumes to interfere between man and wife? Does the law recognize you? One piece of advice may be of service to you: do not be a fool, or be so, and pay for your ignorance and folly."

Print cannot express the tone of concentrated menace and insolence with which his words beat themselves out one by one, like sharp bullets from a gun-mouth, and as he ended, he strode

towards Aglae, who still stood rooted to the ground, frozen with dry fear. Mildmay also strode forward, and pushed Quekett back; and at the moment of imminent chance of violence it was impossible to say which of the two men had the physical advantage—Quekett with his massive weight, or Mildmay, by far the taller, wiry, and animated with loyalty to defend the suffering.

If, however, Quekett had meditated violence towards either Aglae or Mildmay, he stopped short. He made a great effort to control his voice, and asked the question, "Aglae, am I to understand that you refuse to return to me as my wife by fair means?"

"My niece refuses emphatically," interposed Mrs. Dorriforth's voice again, clear as a bell, unwavering.

Quekett disregarded her, and repeated his question to Aglae. The poor child tried to speak, and uttered the words "I refuse" in a voice hollow with fright.

"You force me to other means," said Quekett; and he instantly left the house.

CHAPTER XXII

ESCAPE

After a day or two Mildmay returned to his inn, for they heard no more of Quekett and the threats which had made Mildmay refuse to leave Mrs. Dorriforth's. But, as usual, when we think we are safest we are often in greatest peril, and vigil should know no respite, and no rest.

Mrs. Dorriforth was pacing the room on Aglae's arm—her daily mode of feeble exercise. She was pretty easy that night, and her Dresden china face, with its grey bands of hair and dainty cap, was smiling at some village tale that amused them both. It was cold and raw out of doors, a chill moon glimmering through a pallid veil that betokened further rain, and a mist hung over the distant water, the only sign that water

lay there. Nothing was further from their thoughts than molestation at that late hour, for Mildmay, ever watchful, had promised to warn them if Quekett was about to return.

Suddenly Mrs. Dorriforth interrupted Aglae. Her quick ears, sharpened by ill-health, caught the far-off sound of rolling wheels on the long wet road, and suspicion, ever ready, sent the colour from her pleasant old face, and brought the brave shine into her sunken eyes that meant resolve to do or die.

"Aglae," cried she, "if Henry should come to-night!"

"No fear, aunt," said Aglae, with a throb however; "Sylvain would have——".

"What would you do if he did come?"

"Oh, auntie, what could I do?"

"I will tell you. You could hide in my room, in the cloak-closet which fastens inside, and I would send them down the garden—up the garrets—anywhere off the scent. Then you could slip out through the closet-window, and fly to Sylvain. No one could see you on such a night, you who have the foot of a fawn."

"Dearest aunt, lie down, you are getting excited."

"Aglae—the carriage—the carriage! It is coming up the drive."

Then the panic of fear choked Aglae's tender efforts to soothe her. They watched a coach come up to the door, and the lamplight from the hall fell on the figures of a man, clearly Quekett, and three companions, whose uniform gave Mrs. Dorriforth the electric message of danger.

She turned to Aglae firmly.

"Child, if you do not act now you are lost. Hear me. Take Kate or, better, Mary, I can spare either in such a case—go to Sylvain, let him carry you both this very night to some security which I cannot give you, as you see. Think of nothing but concealment for a day or two, to gain breathing-time. Nothing can be so bad as a return to Henry, it means outrage, restraint, prison itself—and oh! what a relief it would be to me if you were out of the country! While you are here I can never know rest."

She had no time now to call up reason,

caution, social usages. Feet were on the stairs, and with one kiss to Mrs. Dorriforth, Aglae darted into the adjoining room which Mrs. Dorriforth's rapid instinct had indicated to her, and hid herself like some guilty thing from her husband's rights.

Quekett was announced. He came in with his three companions, and went up to Mrs. Dorriforth's sofa. The tact which had supported the poor lady before came to her aid now, in the instinct to gain time.

"Again, Henry Quekett," she cried out with energy, her ear meanwhile strained to catch the sound of an opening window, which should assure her of Aglae's safety; "you come like the thief in the night—like the wolf after the sheep, not like an honest man. Are you afraid of daylight, that you come always at night, always in the dark, and without warning? Who are these men that you force on the privacy of a sick woman, without apology? Is it the law that a man should claim his wife like a thief, not like a husband who has right on his side?"

"If you give me time to speak, Mrs. Dorri-

forth, I will offer every apology for a mode of action forced on me by you. I come as the express brings me, and I must either start or arrive by night. You were one of the witnesses to my wife's deliberate refusal to return to her home. I have therefore employed the only means left to me—compulsion. I am backed by the law. Show Mrs. Dorriforth——"

What, she never knew; the sound she yearned and longed for smote her ear, but too faint through the doors to attract Quekett's notice. The crackling of legal documents further drowned it. Now, even should they search that room first, the bird had flown. All that they said further fell on deaf ears; Mrs. Dorriforth lay back on her couch, counting in imagination Aglae's fleet steps to the village, and those of the faithful Mary who followed her. At last some reiterated query touched her.

"If you will not summon her, we must search the house; we know that she is within."

"You are welcome to do so," said Mrs. Dorriforth, "but some of the rooms are

locked;" and she summoned Kate, and fumbled with keys for ten minutes.

And Aglae was flying along the road to the inn, alone, with steps lightened by terror, and winged with joy. Over the heavy ruts and puddles she went like a hunted deer, the rain and mud soaking her garments and the shawl she had flung over her shoulders. So she sprang upon Mildmay, as he sat at work by his tiny inn fire, and gasped out, wet as a banshee and white as the moon, "Take me away. He is hunting for me there, and in a minute they will be here."

To set the women in one of the traps that stood in the inn yard was not the work of five minutes. They hurried to the station, and sprang into a train that was about to move, bound Aglae never asked whither. They fled whither it went, and found themselves in safety (for the time) at Llandudno, where Mildmay took rooms for Aglae, as his sister, and considerately abstained from inhabiting the same inn.

CHAPTER XXIII

CLOUDS AND THICK DARKNESS

"But in this little interval of rest
May one not press the rose flower to his breast,
The sanguine rose, whose passionate delight
In amorous days of old was infinite,
And now, like some narcotic, sings of rest?"

GOSSE.

AFTER a day spent at Llandudno, Sylvain suggested Liverpool as a far more convenient refuge, whence they might communicate with and hear from Mrs. Dorriforth, and wherein they could avoid better in their loneliness amid crowds, collision with the enemy.

There, the sight of the harbour, and the big ships with their snowy chimneys and black rolling vapours, the delicate masts that pointed as truly to heaven as did ever the church spire, the fairy rigging that crossed and re-crossed the grey October sky, brought to Mildmay a singular home-sickness. England was his birth-

place—the country he had pined for during many dusty years; yet now it seemed to him as though scales had fallen from his eyes. It was the clear wide sea, the boarded deck, that were his real resting-place; India was his veritable fatherland—for that is home, not where our fathers sleep, but where we wake, and work, and enjoy, most fully and completely.

As things had turned out, peace and joy did not dwell in England. Peace and joy dwelt where Aglae would find them—over the sea, on the banks of the Ganges.

Now came the seventh devil to try and torture Aglae, a breach on the side on which she had as yet found only integrity and self-sacrifice. In the teeth of despair, Mildmay's own strength failed when there seemed nothing to gain or to lose.

Mildmay resisted no longer the unspeakable impulse to flee from the miserable bitterness of both their lives, for, alas! he was but a man after all, and he knew that his protection, wandering from place to place, was not only futile but destructive to Aglae, though she

was otherwise completely friendless. He put it before Aglae. "How long is this to go on? When will you be able to live secure from insult and ignominy? Will you come with me to India, whither Quekett is little likely to follow you, and where, if he did, I could set you beyond trace? You have nothing to lose; your position is gone, your happiness and dignity are already wrecked. I say it only because nothing else remains, the law leaves you no alternative."

Again Aglae wavered. Lost in the world's eyes, she was still too proud to lose herself in her own. Her helplessness, her fugitive lot, were becoming intolerable, and yet she shrank —oh, how she shrank!—from the furtive happiness with Sylvain, who still held her worthy of him.

Surely there was some other way out of the danger, a danger even now hardly realized. So hard is it for the young to realize any torment as yet unarrived, however short a way off; so strong are the inherited feelings of ages of self-control, of self-denial; and the righteousness of Aglae's ancestors (in the main)

was probably demonstrated in her dread of wrong-doing, when her own happiness and (in more ways than one) moral purity seemed at variance.

From one point of view her moral purity would be wrecked by going to India with the only man able to protect her. From another point of view, such a step would not impair her inner worth, whilst remaining amongst influences of the worst kind would probably impair if not destroy it. The sight of sin has its own fell contagion, like the inhalation of a poisonous disease, and shame lies, not in the loss of other men's esteem, but in the loss of our own. Aglae could hardly be sure which course would bring her shame in her own eyes. Would not the new life be more healthy, more holy, rightly understood, apart from Quekett, till some possible release rewarded the long waiting? And on the other hand, what would be gained if she gave up a second time the substance for the shadow, happiness for pain? Would she get back the respect of the common-place, the confidence of the ignorant, the sympathy of those who judge from a cursory

glance? Would they ever believe her a pure, ill-used wife, after what had passed? No. Would the game be worth the candle if they did?

Aglae could not make up her mind with the celerity of a former occasion. She saw Sylvain daily, she saw how the strain was beginning to tell upon him, and she knew how much less tolerable is such a state of anxiety and repression to a man than it is to a woman; for a man's code of morals is milder than a woman's, and he can forgive even a woman sooner than a woman can forgive herself.

She considered, and wavered, and mourned helplessly over her complex troubles; and when every difficulty had been answered by one sad, disdainful look in Mildmay's eyes, she fell, womanlike, to bad excuses. She did not like the sea. She had not said good-bye to auntie, who might need her so. She could not bear to stay ten or eleven days in Liverpool till the Calcutta boat went; better to be hiding in some out-of-the-way village.

"God!" cried Mildmay, "say you won't, like a sensible woman, but don't spin off these

empty reasons. Say you think it would be wrong, and I can understand you, though I mayn't agree, but don't pretend that anything prevents but your own will. Mind, I have never said it was right to defy existing rules, only under some circumstances it isn't very wrong; and your fate here would be worse. As to Calcutta, we need not wait for that. The Bombay boat goes every Saturday. The day after to-morrow we might go away and be happy."

"Mildmay, it is impossible. It would take weeks to get ready."

"Nonsense. I would undertake to get any outfit complete any time in eight-and-forty hours."

"But not a lady's?"

"Aglae, how long is this to go on?" he repeated, glancing round the shabby hotel parlour, ornamented by a stuffed weasel, and perfumed with stale cigar.

The comedy of the situation brought laughter and tears to Aglae's assistance. The whole thing was too absurd, too anomalous, too wretched. She ran up to Sylvain, put her

hands on his lofty shoulders, and said, really wavering, "The responsibility lies with the law; you are tempting me beyond what I am able to bear. I will give in, I will be guided by you, if you can honestly assure me I ought. Oh, I can't reason it all out. Sylvain, *is it wrong?*"

"Under these circumstances, no, I honestly think not; I don't see what you are to do, especially if anything happened to your aunt."

"Sylvain, *is it right?*" She changed the question to make the answer more emphatic.

"I don't say it is right: but I say it is not wrong."[1]

They had telegraphed to Mrs. Dorriforth to tell her where they were. An answer from her was placed in Mildmay's hands as he was speaking those words. It ran briefly, telegram-wise: "Glad you are at Liverpool. Take her out of the country. Am sending a companion. Have written as well."

[1] The actual words of a very good and sterling man in 1880!

CHAPTER XXIV

TRIED IN THE FURNACE

"The same white flower—yet chang'd in scent and hue.
Now the fair feeble petals curl and shrink;
The dead smooth surfaces are vein'd with blue;
No honeyed draughts they hold for bee to drink;
Nor busy hum, nor joyous song is heard.
What hath she left, to charm or bee or bird?"

SIR LEWIS MORRIS.

"AM sending a companion." It brought home to her strained and nerveless mind the necessity for action and for a definition of her new and lonely position. It also gave her a sense of relief. She was thankful for a woman's company.

Mrs. Dorriforth had done well. Unable to provide a refuge for Aglae, or charge her husband with the burden of a second establishment, she had sought the co-operation of a neighbour's bright and business-like daughter, who

was in need of no salary, but of occupation, change, and a less restricted home than her father's. Brimful of English middle-class pluck and resource, and prepared to travel to the ends of the earth if need were, Miss ap Jones put hope into Aglae's heart and drew additional energy into her own.

As the coarse excrescences of character developed in Quekett's circle had immediately died down in the delicate calm of congenial duties at Bangor, now under healthy influence Aglae's initial courage revived. She lost the hunted look, the helpless inactivity which had followed like a reaction the feverish desperation which flung her upon Mildmay's hands. She braced her nerves to a wise and womanly course. Not to run further risks by embarking for a cloud-begirt colonial refuge—not to leave the country without striking a blow in her own defence, she decided with her comrade's help to maintain herself at least until some form of legal freedom could be discovered. The ready friend in need, Mildmay, proposed to go to London and obtain the most skilled opinions and advice. Then for the first time

in his experience Aglae spoke of her child. It was as though long-pent-up flood-gates had been forced down.

"I cannot let the child stay with him, and grow up like his father. I ought to have known. I thought of myself only. I must have Harry—make a little home later—train him—he is nearly three years old now."

Sylvain was touched, cut to the heart. He saw that under the crust of unnatural dread and dislike nature was healthy, and the mother's heart instantly sought the child's welfare as soon as she saw where it lay. She was thinking aloud. "I must hide him somewhere, somehow. I must teach him day by day, hour by hour, not to be selfish—not to be cruel—to be merciful, not cruel—it will help me to be better too. That is something to live for. We might go far, far away, when I have earned a little money."

The blow had to be dealt. "I doubt if you can claim the child, although he is so young. The mother is not a partner, even in her children. They are no more legally hers than the

furniture, unless a jury decide so. But I will faithfully do my best."

"I cannot have the child!" cried Aglae in a new burst of indignation. "But he is mine! I brought him into the world! He couldn't be born without a mother, whereas——"

"I know. But law and ethics are two things," said Sylvain in despair. "You would have no chance with a jury, because of—because of Carrington."

* * * * *.

Sancta simplicitas! It is very easy to say "I will get my own living," and rather pleasant to be chidden for needless self-sacrifice, and praised for pluck. These preliminaries have their excitement, as the most mournful event has its titillating—almost enjoyable—side whilst the crisis lasts. It is *afterwards* that the worst pain comes. After death, the long increasing sense of loss; after torture, the monotonous after-pain of retracting muscles; after resolution and the strain of making out a course of action, the weary effort in cold blood to carry the resolutions out and not to

go back upon the friendly laudations. Here the worst comes in!

This lesson was learnt by Mrs. Quekett without much delay. Miss ap Jones was enthusiastic in devising and advising for both self-help and secrecy. It was a new excitement for her after her dull and contracted Welsh life, and the advertising and answering advertisements filled up an incredible number of quite exciting days. There was no extreme alacrity on the part of the public to secure an uncertificated governess, or a lady's companion who had not been out before, and who looked not very strong—or a companion and chaperon to young ladies of good position with an invalid mother, or "another lady" to go shares in a small business.

Nor indeed until Mrs. Quekett had come down from several high horses, and much reduced her proud original terms, did any response at all come to her printed baits in the daily journals. Aglae was no doubt far less eligible for any of the posts she solicited than the harder and robuster Miss ap Jones herself. The first interview was abruptly closed before

it had well begun, by the interviewer saying aloud to her sister—"Won't do: much too good-looking." The second was not more successful (though she had concealed her beautiful wavy hair in a sterner bonnet), on account of "unsatisfactory" reticence under cross-examination as to why a married woman not a widow was seeking a first place. And a third chance was destroyed by non-reticence. A separated wife could not possibly be tolerated as companion to innocent girls.

There was something ironic in the actual result of these weeks and weeks of search, stretching into months at last. Miss ap Jones, who had created a favourable impression more than once when Mrs. Quekett had created the reverse, was forcibly taken possession of by a rich American family, where Aglae had hoped for an engagement. Generosity, and the young woman's own elation, made obstacles impossible, and rather than be left again absolutely alone, Aglae allowed herself to be accepted on a week's trial in a rich tradesman's family, the salary to commence when the family were satisfied of her fitness for the post.

That week was one of unmixed misery and constant friction. Inquisitiveness was pushed to the point of insult, and thoughtlessness soon arrived at cruelty in a place where the governess was expected to be up at six doing one child's hair and another's lessons: on her feet all day, directing the amusements and reconciling the opposing wills of a dozen ill-bred people; and all the evening in readiness to play and sing to the vulgar friends who dropped in to stare. Aglae gave up at her week's end, and choked over the haggling as to who was to pay her departing cab-fare.

Then came a breakdown in health in a poor lodging, where the slavey did not keep up the fire and forgot to make the bed. Constant railway fares and correspondence use up strength and energy and money even without the inward bleeding of miserable suspense. There is little demand for half-trained workers, employers will not train even shop-girls and servants unless they get labour in lieu of output. Where could she hide when no cranny was safe from the police, telegraphy, and the kodak? Had she not done all she could?

Did she want more than even the beasts of the field have a claim to—the *jus animalium* —what old Humphrey Primatt defined as "the three rights—food, rest, and tender usage"?

Advice she must have. Alone, sick, sleepless and despairing, Aglae gave in and summoned Major Mildmay.

* * * * *

"And this is the 'best advice!' the *dernier mot* of English legislation!" cried Aglae, when Sylvain had told her all the terrible truth. "I cannot obtain a divorce because I cannot produce witnesses. I cannot obtain judicial separation because there is no 'legal cruelty.' I am not entitled to maintenance unless I go back to him. I cannot have my baby unless I go back to him. I have refused that, therefore now he is proceeding for 'restitution of conjugal rights.' Restitution! it is a disgrace to a civilized country! I cannot defend, and I cannot come to a money arrangement. He already has all my money. *I thought slavery was abolished!*" Mildmay mopped his brow. "Sylvain, if I had never gone

away—as I did—should I have been in a better position?"

"I think not," Sylvain had to say.

"Had I then, as now, no right to my own privacy, maintenance, and peace?—even the birds have that!"

"No."

"And the Church service" (she was turning the leaves of her little Prayer-book) "is binding in law on the woman, but *not upon the man.* Sylvain," she said, rising with a new light in her eyes, "I cannot live the life of a hunted beast. It is a choice merely between two evils, and the restitution of conjugal rights is the worst!"

"Do you mean you will let me protect you in the only way?" said Sylvain, with deep feeling in his voice.

"I *ask* you to protect me from the gross immorality of the law," said Aglae, "as my only capable friend. I ask you to place me in concealment—in any country and under any circumstances—which will preserve me on the human level. I ask you for this act of friendship—I don't buy it—I do not bind myself to

any return or repayment—I cannot repay you. I ask in God's name!"

Sylvain was so moved by her agitation that he could not speak for a few moments. It was no longer his own happiness which appealed to him, it was her agony and helplessness, and his answer was not the joyful cry of an accepted lover, but the solemn oath of the priest consecrated to a holy service.

"I will protect you," he said, "in God's name, and the name of our common humanity and morality. I will conceal, support, advise you, as time shows need. I will ask, and I will have, nothing in return. God in heaven! I swear it, church or no church—though we were to have gone to church once—and this binds me whilst I live."

He stretched up his hand in the attitude almost instinctive to earnestness, and recognized even in savage tribes when they vow in the temples of their divinities; and Aglae, hardly knowing what she had asked or undertaken, felt the deep peace of confidence and reliance steal over her fevered brain.

A few days afterwards the daily journals recorded Major Mildmay's departure to Bombay. If a Mrs. Smith or a Mrs. Jones and her maid embarked on the same vessel, that did not make him responsible.

CHAPTER XXV

FUEL TO FIRE

"The venom clamours of a jealous woman
Poison more deadly than a mad dog's tooth.

AGLAE'S first cold-weather in the new country was by no means disagreeable. The novelty of the fresh scene and mode of life, new faces, and the novel freedom from all *active* external vexations, saved her from suffering acutely from passive ones.

Not that she could hope to escape from the latter class of annoyance. In Calcutta, live as quietly as you may, the eye of Mrs. Grundy is no less sharp to mark what is amiss than elsewhere, rather the reverse, therefore prudence required that the life she led should be a very recluse one, and given out as necessarily so on the ground of Aglae's delicacy—which at the commencement was true enough.

Mildmay thought it best, on bringing her to Calcutta, to call on excessively few persons, and those only men and their wives who would not be likely to be unduly hard on them should aught "blow up": and thus he settled her in one of the suburbs of Calcutta, Alleypore, in a pleasant villa with a good "compound," as it is called, which Aglae shared with a widowed Calcutta resident, and felt he had done his best for her security and peace.

Peace it was, and salutary calm. She had time to consider her past and her future. And with a sick horror, as one startled out of madness into sanity, she learned to see the real light in which her actions must have appeared, and rightly appeared, to others: how little real moral muscle she had brought to bear on her life, how little real principle she had opposed to her temptations, how necessary it was to recast and dignify her life in future. Her companion was an energetic, benevolent woman, interested in the native schools and similar good works. Aglae found the necessity for relying on herself, acting on

her own judgment (after educating that judgment first!), gave her plenty to do, and helped her to conquer and elevate that old helpless, selfish self which had perhaps "touched bottom" in Vitré.

She used in later times to look back to her Indian life as stepping-stones to higher things and a wider outlook; though at the time she was sensible of little enjoyment, frequent depression, and fears lest her story should be known, and much grinding heart-sickness, since Mildmay seldom ventured to see her.

However, perhaps many of my readers will say even now that fate was too good for her. One who drives under a false flag, however timidly, deserves to incur the utmost rigour of the social law; and very possibly, though nothing was known to her disadvantage, and she was as innocent as many a *suspecte* in the Reign of Terror, her end would have proved as fatal as theirs, had not a singular change occurred when she had about concluded half-a-year in India.

A letter reached Mildmay of so unmistakable an import that it completely altered

their then state of life and all their plans for the future. On receipt of it, Mildmay felt it incumbent on him at all risks to verify the news it contained, even if it cost him his post, and Aglae his protection during the coming year. With some difficulty he secured a deputy for several months in the Museum, and prepared himself for a hasty flight to Australia, and thence to England if needful.

This was the letter—

"*Melbourne, April* 1889.

"DEAR SIR,

"About a year ago you called on me in London, as you will perhaps remember, with Captain Carrington, to ask for the biography of a friend of my husband's, Mr. Henry Quekett, sometime of Melbourne, Australia—I suppose for press purposes, as I know you are yourself an editor. Is it a comic paper?—I am afraid I have forgotten! At that time I was naturally surprised at such an application touching a matter that concerned me in no way, but since my stay here I have, by a singular chance, heard a number of

absurd rumours which may amuse you, since you appeared to wish for funny details, and which I now give you—not, as I say, that they have any interest for me at all, or because I suppose them to be true, but because it has been a little on my mind that my manner gave you an impression of incivility—dangerous with you interviewers!—that I was far from meaning. However, don't publish without verifying.

"Henry Quekett was born in England in 1846, and emigrated with his family to Australia at the age of sixteen under circumstances of peculiar romance. In 1876 he married a rich maiden lady, in feeble health, whose property was settled upon him at the time of the marriage, and who shortly afterwards became totally paralyzed. In 1879 Mr. Quekett left this philosophic invalid (of course in the care of a nurse and a medical man, still alive and here), and went to Europe, providing for her maintenance up to the end of 1882. Nothing could have been more business-like! Whether she died when required, or whether she didn't, well! particulars can be got here.

I am supposing that you still want them—for the interview! What a cruel world we live in! People have managed to make a lot of gossip about the poor lady's life—not to say her death!—bearing upon life insurances, &c. Most ridiculous!

"I thought it might interest you to know this, but if I am mistaken I have only to apologize for interfering in what does not concern me.

"Yours faithfully,

"F. WILEY.

"P.S.—There are yet other amusing rumours about Mr. Quekett's late father, and the way in which he obtained, and his son retained, much of the property they owned in this country. But I am certain it is quite untrue that Mr. Quekett senior 'served his time.' Mrs. Quekett senior was a Dorriforth. People are always pretending here that all but themselves are convicts. A nice, good-natured set! I love New South Wales—the scenery is worth a visit from the ends of the earth."

The tone of this ingenious letter, in spite of the writer's reiterated unconcern, led Sylvain to suspect that Mrs. Wiley possessed a good deal further information, which she was too cautious to commit to paper. No one knew better that Aglae had married Quekett in July 1881. No one knew better that Sylvain was no interviewer, nor Carrington an editor. And no one would have written even under that pretext without a purpose to subserve. Why should she, who clearly had an interest in keeping clear of the meshes of a web which might brush her own wings, come forward thus and volunteer evidence which threatened completely to destroy the character of her whilom friend? Beneath the velvet Mildmay saw the steel-hard talon of the unforgiving woman, who had sought and traced and followed with the sleepless industry of hate the obscure clue which led her to her revenge.

And what a revenge! There is no serpent so crafty and dangerous—no enemy so unscrupulous or untiring, as the woman whose love has turned to hate.

So Aglae commenced her second half-year of lonely and *suspecte* monotony in her quiet villa, whilst Mildmay hastened to Melbourne to seek what was first requisite—an interview with Mrs. Wiley.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DREAD REVENGE

"Can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched? . . . Wounds and dishonour shall he get: and his reproach shall not be wiped away."
PROVERBS vi. 28, 33.

MILDMAY was not wrong in his surmise. When he reached Melbourne, and announced his arrival to the Judge and his helpmeet, he found that fair lady armed with a mass of evidence against Mr. Quekett which, in a communication *vivâ voce*, she took small trouble to make impersonal, and nothing was said about the press or the interviewer. There was thoroughness, we might even say a delicate minuteness, about her work which promised the safe-conduct of a *cause célèbre*, combining the force of a Rembrandt with the finish of a Gerhard Dow.

Quekett had been wise in his generation, no doubt. He had been skilful in partly effacing, and almost successfully eliminating the traces of his youth and early manhood in the new country.

But Mrs. Wiley was an artist, and she had facts, whispers, insurance receipts, witnesses, addresses, dates, all under her hand, and in her eye sat the enthusiasm of the spider who knows its business. Quekett's parentage, early habits, and private practices had been neatly investigated. His business arrangements, his friends, his first wife's, had been catalogued with scientific ardour, and Sylvain felt curls of delight run through him as fact after fact was set in perfect order before him. There was evidence of Quekett's obtaining all his wife's property by a deed of gift. There was evidence of neglect, and even ill-usage, afterwards; and the paralysis which had caused her sequestration was shown to have itself a probable cause, for Quekett was indisputably violent sometimes. Cleverly concealed as she was, even her name suppressed in the "Home" to which her husband consigned her, proof was

accessible that Mrs. Quekett had survived not only the worst usage of her boy-husband, but his second marriage in England.

Mildmay lay back and laughed his congratulations on her finesse. "Then you meant business after all, that day when you sent us about ours!" and Mrs. Wiley laughed prettily, like a Borgia who has just got her poison swallowed. Aglae's marriage was no doubt void, therefore her liberty was secured, and his own hopes loomed rosy in the months to come, for the costs of such a lengthy case meant little to him.

With a few reassuring letters to Aglae, invalided in Alleypore, Mildmay sailed for England, and three months from the day he left her, saw him deep in discussion again with the best counsel in London, whose love of a "good case" equals that of the surgeon's; and the suit for restitution of conjugal rights, which had hung fire in Quekett's difficulty of tracing Aglae, was picturesquely balanced with a counter-suit, involving frauds of every description, bubble companies, the disappear ance of wills, and next-door to wife-murder.

The society papers were doing a fair business on Miss Pringle's bold position, and some raised hands of holy horror, and some showed up the flaws in the marriage-laws which encouraged the pioneers of reform to set accepted canons at defiance. The writers of these paragraphs, being men, could afford to take both sides, because on the one hand all the proprietors of obedient wives would be with them, and on the other, no one suffers but the woman.

Mrs. Pringle was hunted up, and proved to be in a permanently watery state about her Joyce. What shocked the poor old lady most was less the act of irregularity itself than the indifference manifested by many persons whose horror she had dreaded. They did not respect Joyce, but they did not mind her immorality, and, supposing the dinner was large enough, and cost enough money, several of the straightest-laced did not decline to dine with "that extraordinary pair—just for joke, don'tcherknow."

As the weapons in the enemy's hands came to be well understood by Mr. Quekett, happy as he was, dining, drinking, dancing, quite

like an honest and respected citizen, with Miss Pringle openly figuring as the prophet of a new creed, his counsel began to sing a new tune. The threatening collapse of two capital cases was coeval with the judgment in another case of far-reaching importance to women, known as the Clitheroe case, in which Mrs. Jackson refused to consummate her marriage, and resisted her loving husband's arguments by the tender means of assault and restraint, supported though he was by the inherited opinion of the populace. Many educated persons still believe, in the face of this and other cases, and in spite of protective Acts which they do not read, that a husband has the right to force his wife to live with him, and to bear him children, whether she likes it or not; and a man's native orientalism is so tickled by the idea, that he battles for it as hotly as if he were in the right.[1]

[1] The misapprehension is so rooted, that Mr. Justice C—— and Mr. Justice J—— held that the husband "had *prima facie* a right to regain possession of his wife," and that "though generally the forcible detention of a subject by another is *prima facie* illegal, yet when the relation is that of husband and wife the detention is not

But the enlightened judgment in the Clitheroe case entirely altered Aglae Quekett's position. It dispensed with the sore necessity she had been under, of accepting Major Mildmay's protection. It rendered her "an honest woman" because it made it possible for Aglae to return to her aunt's house without fear of arrest, and that was a redeeming point in Mildmay's disappointed efforts to free her; whilst the temporary withdrawal of proceedings prevented the public admission of the illegality of her unhappy marriage, and Aglae might count that as another. If her marriage proved void, too, her money became her own again.

Mildmay's path, all the same, was not all roses. Time pressed, for his furlough would end with the twelvemonth. He was chilled almost to sickness by Aglae's letters bewailing chiefly the dread of finding her marriage null and void, instead of rejoicing at her possible freedom.

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illegal," at the very time (April 1891) when the Lord Chancellor ruled that "no such right or power exists in law," and "I am of opinion that no such right ever did exist in our law."—*Times*, April 20, 1891.

That was what she could not forget—what Mildmay, who wanted only her freedom, could not bear in mind. This was a woman's notion of "respectability," founded on nothing but tradition or custom, as far as any moral significance was concerned.

Mildmay's people condemned in the strongest terms what they believed his madness. Not angry with Miss Dorriforth when she first emancipated their boy—sisters and mothers seldom resent that—they made a great deal of her heartlessness on that score when they learned of her imprudence on another. Their opposition was natural enough. For the eldest son of an old county family, and already practically its head—for their boy, their bright, gallant soldier, who had already sacrificed so much to this dreadful woman, to throw up his whole career for the sake of a wife they could not visit, was too grievous, too disappointing, too shocking! True, she was a lady, and handsome enough to win society's pardon, and not quite a beggar; but the eccentricity of the past would be always remembered, and nothing could comfort them for the disgrace she had

brought, and would bring, on innocent people, who connected themselves with her.

And now Mr. Quekett, whose revenge was slipping from his grasp by an unlucky combination of circumstances, began to question seriously *whence* Mildmay got his knowledge. He had not yet discovered that Aglae was in Calcutta; where Mildmay's post in the Calcutta Museum was intrepidly nursed for him. But he knew that Mildmay had returned to England *viâ* Australia, and he revolved in his mind the name of every person he knew there who could have become his enemy since he quitted those shores. Money and prudence kill many foes, and some of the charges of which he got wind were, short of sorcery, of inexplicable origin. He even suggested to his counsel the propriety of forestalling the main case with an action for libel, and scoring another point by sheer pluck.

His counsel discouraged that. Though only Quekett could know whether the libels were true, the criminal annals showed they were not impossible. If proven, the whole fabric of his position would crumble. If non-proven,

some mud would stick. Who, in the name of occult evil, could have ferreted out this and that?

A sudden suspicion crept into Quekett's mind. On the very verge of a promising turn in the case, a question was asked and answered; and those who noted Quekett's face, thought of Thetis' son, armed to the teeth, but conscious only of a vulnerable heel, and they seemed to see in one instant the tissues of prime years fall into the grey hollows of death.

Who was this confederate, this sorcerer, this far-off ally, smelling out the sod as a hog smells truffles, in the very churchyard? We only know that Henry Quekett was answered.

"Mrs. Wiley."

There are certain irritable conditions of the brain when a very slight shock will derange the delicate poise dividing a man from a maniac. No slight shock was this; and Mr. Quekett had withdrawn himself upon some excuse—five minutes' grace to force his mind to composure; five minutes alone, away from searching and but half-sympathetic eyes; five minutes for his spirit to revolve in one fell

instant, days, months, years of passionate love —days, months, years of pent-up secret sore revenge against one he believed helpless under the whip, and whose proud character was his target through the shadowy Aglaes and Joyces who had never touched his soul—an animosity which was itself a poisonous homage to love. And now the duel between them was ending, she the victor; he, the man, beaten, circumvented, ruined, by a foe he had sacrificed every principle to crush; a few minutes to recall it all—to regret nothing—to think of her. . . .

Henry Quekett passed the Rubicon in those terrible minutes. He came forth a raving maniac,[1] everything past, gone, done with, save the meaningless impulse to punish—to maim—to destroy.

It was a fearful scene; but it ended,

[1] A similar instance of sudden insanity occurred a few years ago, and was commented upon in the newspapers, in the case of a young lady who, on returning from a ball, apparently in her usual health, was seized during five minutes' absence of her mother with uncontrollable mania, probably from over-excitement. She eventually recovered.

happily, without bloodshed. Overpowered by numbers, the wretched man was bound and conveyed to that prison whose walls hide many a story as terrible.

Mrs. Wiley was deeply disgusted. She seemed to come off worst, since her revenge was only indirect.

Another person was disappointed, Carrington, who brought to Mildmay on the eve of sailing an ugly little illustration of the really unscrupulous new woman—such as Joyce.

"She hasn't any feeling," said Carrington. "She has no idea that she isn't all right, or that a married woman deserves any consideration. Indeed, she seemed to like her prey the better because it was somebody else's. She is back with her mother as if nothing had happened, and says that such private affairs concern no one, any more than the cut of her clothes, and the old lady is more like her servant than her mother. A daughter like that won't be much of a wife. I have never pretended to be a saint, but I declare, if anything can make a man see what his actions

look like from the other side, it's a case like Joyce's, when the tables are turned. I'm hanged if I don't—if I don't——"

"Turn over a new leaf, my boy?" said Sylvain, laying his kindly hand on the young fellow's shoulder.

"Well, cut it, at any rate. I'm not proud of my part in her education—Mrs. Quekett's, I mean. But for me much wouldn't have happened. 'Twas I persuaded Quekett to run over to the old country with me. One for him, two for myself though. He was free with his money, and a pleasant enough fellow to travel with. He was kind to me out there, gave me lots of big dinners and fun. Wish I'd left him there!"

"Going to India?"

"No, no. Japan—Iceland—Rocky Mountains—come back and settle. I've done with fooling. The end ain't nice."

"No. It is as well sometimes to see life and its peccadilloes in perspective. It is rather a surprise."

"Don't slate me, old man. I'm down on my luck."

"I was slating the people who hurt *her*—I meant to at least," said Mildmay, with a pull at his meerschaum and holding out his hand. "I shall be glad to hear of you, old boy, and I think *she* will. Do yourself better justice in the future—I know you will."

Carrington grasped his hand, graver than ever Mildmay had seen him, and his last words were—"Give her my——"

"Your love—I will."

When Aglae stood and watched the long grey streak of the P. and O. liner that was to bring her a whole new life of joy and honour gradually darken and lengthen till it hove within reach of foot and voice, her eyes were streaming with tears, not of gladness, but of unreasonable pain. She had been long enough removed from unhealthy associations to have recovered her moral equilibrium; and her intense compunction for the act from the consequences of which Sylvain had been sent to save her, had set a seal of permanent sadness on her face. The horror of the knowledge that her marriage had never been

valid had possessed her night and day for many grievous weeks. The thought of the man she had once so loved and dreaded, now abased and broken in the miserable ignominy of madness; the loss of the faint and few fragments of memories of him not unworthy of her, small secret treasures that had been some comfort in her darkest hours; and last, not least, the thought of the child she had borne him; all these things, equally and completely incomprehensible to the masculine mind, rendered her rather a Niobe than a Psyche, when Mildmay stepped forth to greet her, looking so bright, so glad, so hale, and handsome and soldierly.

No; Sylvain would never understand her complex feelings—the grief as well as the joy—only a woman understands the web of a woman's mind. He would never see why she should feel shame where sin of hers had not entered, and pain at the breach of a tie which ought never to have been contracted; he would feel no regret that such a man should end in such a manner. But perchance he had divined that there would be something

a man could not cope with in such a sensitive, nipped being as was Aglae now; and that a woman could help them both. For who was that, veiled and swathed in widow's garb, who came forth presently, leaning on Mildmay's arm? Yes, truly, it was Aunt Dorriforth, dear, sorely-needed guardian, and Kate close by.

It was almost too much for aunty and Aglae both; but joy kills few, and they were on the verge of a golden fate.

As Mildmay stepped ashore two telegrams were put into his hand, and he hardly heard the soft joyous voice whispering to his ear—"The child, the child, dear Sylvain, now that we are all together—may he not come too? After all, the little thing is not responsible for my misery—after all, I am his mother—and he is almost fatherless."

"Quite, dear Aglae. Look—Quekett is dead."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE AFTERGLOW

"Only a faint sweet odour lingers yet,
Dearer than those rich scents of former years;
A fragile fairness, fairer through regret,
And water'd by the dewy fount of tears.
To me that outcast flower is dearer grown,
Than when in those fair gardens overblown."

SIR LEWIS MORRIS.

WHEN the storm is past, and God lays His hand softly

"On the curl'd head of His slumbering sea,"

the levelled waves, like the soul of a child dreaming, can begin to take the colours of the heaven so close o'erhead. And when the terrible storm-time of Aglae's life was past, and the joy of rest and happiness lost its almost agonizing novelty, her mind grew calm, and she could occupy herself with new and

wholesome interests, as it were in a passion of gratitude and aspiration.

Little Hal was her joy and her discipline; Sylvain's discipline chiefly. He was a boy with a twist, not easy to deal with. During the years of estrangement from his mother his father's relatives had taught him to despise her; but when he came to know her (since he had done no wrong), he loved her so easily that the adverse influence had its own overwhelming reaction, whilst on her part she loved him with a tenderness perhaps quickened by self-reproach. This, however, was his *crux* —he could not believe in people loving him. It may be that he inherited the consciousness of Cain.

At ten years old Harry was rough and clumsy, a lumpish, sturdy, fair-faced lad, promising to be a giant, with his father's untameable will, his mother's sensitiveness, and erratic wild impulses which made him fit ill a regular household.

When the second Sylvain came to be playmate with the second Hal, the boy's intense love of his mother took the form of the

bitterest jealousy. He was generous—the boy whom he regarded as the wedge between him and all that he held dearest was mostly as safe with him as with the ayah—but his morbid side created about him an atmosphere of misery which inflated and isolated him. Van, however, worshipped his big brother as a god.

The difficulties of training two boys in India, with six years between them, brought the Mildmays to England immediately when the Norfolk property came to them; Mrs. Dorriforth with them, who had grown younger and stronger in India, and now never left them. Only one faint cloud coloured their blue sky, the human impossibility of Sylvain's perfect sympathy with Henry Quekett's product, and Hal's perception of the fact.

Still, Harry's hatred of Van was not chronic; it came on in bursts after domestic irritations, which to no one else could have had any serious results. A sudden smile from Aglae to her younger child would some days kindle a fire in the elder which

smouldered the longer as he tried to repress it. Every year Hal became odder and more touchy.

Whilst Van rejoiced at every good thing which came Hal's way, Hal hated himself for grudging Van a little notice or pleasure, and laid strange penances upon himself to make amends—gave Van his pet soldiers, his best prizes, his fishing tackle—he was not the only person in the world whose gifts are largely apologetic—only to nurse more bitterness afterwards because Van led him into so sore sacrifices; though his mother saw only the kindness to Van, and not the hatred behind it.

One night Hal[1] could not restrain the pricking desire to remove this cross from his life, this wedge. He had been burning for days. He reflected, he repented, he prayed; but all the same he took his pistol, loaded it, and shoeless felt his way to the bedside of the little boy. One touch, and peace was within his reach, peace that no interloper would disturb—one touch, and a few hours' punishment,

[1] These anecdotes of a boy of eleven years old are *true*.

and nothing would ever again come between all he lovëd and him. He put the cocked pistol to the child's ear, and he rejoiced to feel his power to avenge and defend himself —the child slept on unconscious, unafraid, uncovered, his little nightgown as usual twisted round his neck, wholly at his mercy.

Why did he creep away up-stairs, and never pull the trigger? He would have said (had he ever been asked) that the helplessness checked him. It "wasn't fair." So that a chance saved poor little Van, as a chance saves us all from perils that we know not of.

Little Van forged his own hold on Hal's inly tender heart in another hour of morbid depression. Van was a merry little curly-wig, but he had feelings; and he was miserable when he found his lofty idol in a very undignified position under a hayrick, his conduct beseeming rather the first few days at sea than the firm foothold of life on land.

Poor Hal had been revolving his griefs till his very bowels were as water, and just then "You are ill, Hally? can't I do somefin' for you, Hally?" sounded in his ear. "No?—

let me call mother. No ?—let me fetch father. No ?—shall I rub your forehead, Hally ? "

Harry was as sulky as sick, and growling out eternal *no's* bade the child be off, and pretended to sleep.

But little Van knew that not sleep closed those bloodshot eyes—it might be what burnt *his* eyes when the ayah would not give him his own way. Presently Hal's aching head was enveloped in a cool green cloud, and something almost as sweet as mother was pushed between his teeth. An armful of fresh grasses and flowers plucked by the loving little fellow, and some long-treasured lemon-drops were his childish offering to a pain for which he dared not summon relief.

Though this passed from Van's white mind an hour afterwards, Hal never forgot his innocent care.

When Harry went indoors Mildmay met him, and examined his pallid cheeks with displeasure. " You have been smoking again," he said. Harry neither affirmed nor denied, and only One above knew whether he had smoked only, or had been ablaze in the flame

which dieth not. But search would have disclosed a little phial labelled laudanum, every drop of which had been wrung singly from groom, housekeeper, and chemist, till he had collected enough to kill a horse. After which he had stolen to a lonely spot, not angry, but tenderly regretful that no one could care about him, tenderly hopeful that not mother but one of the farm-men would find his body first, tenderly alive to the pretty world he seemed so useless in, glad that every blade of grass, every busy beetle was there to say good-bye, and drank the fatal drops with a real heart-leap.

Then he waited, and watched the beetle. A clock struck, and it seemed strange that he was not dead, and could hear it; then, sickness. An overdose!

Why do boys do these strange deeds? Who can fathom the mystery of the human spirit and its inherited burdens and contradictions?

With sickness came sanity. Why did Harry never repeat the experiment and forget his dark act next day? The mood blew over like a heavy cloud, and left him the same Hal

with no sense of guilt or grief. Was the descendant of Quekett, and of Quekett's father, without the moral sense?

Major Mildmay's home-farm, like most big farms, included a dangerous bull, and the boys were forbidden under dire penalties to approach the cattle either to drive or harass. But penalty creates appetite, and when Hal was on good terms with Van, it was just like his luck that mutual fun as often as not meant double mischief. The bailiff liked Hal's "bush" proclivities, and winked at Hal's occasional "help." It was intensely jolly to help with the cattle. It was also jolly to splash and swim in the blue brook, of which an arm divided the cattle pastures, crossed by a tiny bridge.

One sunny morning the boys were stripped for a swim when the fiend of forgetfulness entered in. In two minutes they were down the runlet, excited by their physical freedom, dancing like a pair of monkeys, and throwing clods at each other. Further and further in the forbidden field their pranks led them,

when suddenly they saw—they *heard*—that close to them in the shade the bull was grazing.

Now the bull had endured much in the course of his life, but two naked boys were unbearable; and before worse happened to him he felt it necessary to him to put his foot down. Down he put it therefore, first one hoof and then the other, so that the earth answered. A start, a brief remonstrant roar, a tail uptossed—the next breath was thunder and dust in the air—the angry brute made for the two pink shreds, and with far less celerity the two pink shreds made for the bridge, poor five-year-old Van well behind.

Now Hal saw in a flash what really threatened, not play, but death; and Van (his cross) and Van's father (another cross) were at his mercy, by his own act to live or die—to die horribly or to live heart-broken.

The bull was upon them before they could reach the bridge gate, Van naturally nearest him. Down went the sharp horn to the turf, in another second Van's small body would be in the air. With no conscious will

Hal darted back, so far diverting the brute's attention as to intercept the blow, which struck up comparatively lightly into his own side.

Van, screaming, would have sprung to him, for the child's instinct was loyal, but Hal cried, "To the water, the water"; and as the bull made for the scream, Hal dragged himself to the bridge-stays trying to plunge, and there dropped strengthless.

Oddly, the bull paused at the narrow bridge, fearing a trap; and the naked boys felt the planks shudder under the pounding of his fore-hoofs, and saw the rheumy fury in red eye and nostril within a yard of them.

"Mother must not lose both of us," gasped Harry, his groin streaming with blood; "run, Van, straight to mother—you can get away whilst he is killing *me*."

"Never will I leave you, we will be killed together," cried the hero heart of the little boy; and again the bull lowered his bloody horn and came a step, ever such a short step, nearer.

"Listen to me, Van," said Hal, with a note in his voice that reached something deeper

than a child's ordinary understanding, and his own face took the mature lines of a man's. "I'm ripped up, and can't move. You cannot stop the brute. You cannot save me. Father or the farm men could save us both, but the two of us together can do nothing to save each other, unless some one can give the alarm. First the bull will kill me, and then he will kill you. But if you can run within earshot of the yard, you will save—yes, *you will save* ME, *Van.*"

Poor Van then blindly ran, for Hal's sake, to save Hal.

When a few minutes later half-a-score men, headed by the terrified master, rushed to the spot, they found only the bull kneeling on the poor pink shell of what had been a brave and noble boy. And so—by Divine mercy—Hal died for Van.

The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.

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